

THE "SHRIEKING SISTERHOOD"

**Membership, Policy and Strategy of the
Women's Social and Political Union
In Leicester and the East Midlands.
1907 - 1914.**

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**"I remember thinking (of Mrs Pethick - Lawrence) what a terrible woman
she must be, and had at that time a holy terror of the Shrieking Sisterhood."**

Helen Watts In Nottingham, March 1909.

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Abstract

This thesis assesses the Women's Social and Political movement in the East Midlands and investigates its importance to the national struggle for the vote between 1907 and 1914. It argues that, in Leicester, Nottingham and Northampton, the branches were not merely appendages to the London organisation, but rather they had their own identity and played their part in the wider agitation. It further addresses the perception that the Pankhursts' WSPU was a predominantly middle-class party that had little or nothing to do with working-class women and highlights the long tradition of working-class radical feminism that existed in the boot and shoe trade union movement.

Moreover, this study also attempts to address the previously overlooked wealth of evidence that relates to the movement at a local level and attacks the belief that the fight for emancipation had little to do with ordinary women outside the capital. This idea has long propagated the notion that only a small, select, privileged band of women were responsible for the militant struggle. Yet, that is not true. Many thousands of nameless women were prepared to endure the hardship of prison and ostracism within their community in the name of women's rights. This oversight belies the fundamental problem of how previous studies have been researched and presented. Indeed, few investigations have been carried out into local organisations with the Women's Social and Political Union and, as a consequence, our understanding of local women within the party has been retarded. This study, therefore, seeks to readdress the balance and add to our understanding of who were the suffragettes.

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Abbreviations

BFPU	Birmingham Female Political Union
CLWS	Church League for Women's Suffrage
FWW	Federation of Women Workers
LAHU	Leicester Amalgamated Hosiery Union
LMS	Lace Makers' Society
ILPWA	Independent Labour Party Women's Auxiliary
ILP	Independent Labour Party
INUWBSO	The Independent National Union of Women's Boot and Shoe Operatives
MPU	Men's Political Union for Women's Enfranchisement
NES	North of England Society
NESWS	North Eastern Society for Women's Suffrage
NUBSO	National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives
NUWSS	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
NFPU	Nottingham Female Political Union
NWO	Nottingham Women's Organisation
PSF	People's Suffrage Federation
SDF	Social Democratic Fereration
TUC	Trade Union Congress
WCG	Women's Cooperative Guild
WFL	Women's Freedom League
PL	Primrose League
WCA	Women's Conservative Association
WLA	Women's Liberal Association
WLF	Women's Liberal Federation
WLL	Women's Labour League
WLRC	Women's Labour Representation Committee
WRG	Women's Railway Guild
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union
WTUL	Women's Trade Union League

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The age between the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and the First World War is often seen by some historians ⁽¹⁾ as a period of emancipation of the urban and industrial classes. Likewise, primarily due to the recent work by feminist historians like Sandra Holton ⁽²⁾ and June Purvis, ⁽³⁾ historians have placed the emancipation of women of all social classes in the context of the growth of Britain as a politically democratic society. Yet although many writers of modern, social history ⁽⁴⁾ have described in detail, and with a measure of sympathy, the plight of women and the campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, they have tended to overlook the wealth of evidence that relates to the movement at a local level. Instead, a broad national, and indeed, international picture has often been painted of women's fight for equality that distracts from any real understanding of who these women were.

As Leah Leneman pointed out, it is now "prudent to question whether there are alternative histories which have been ignored or dismissed by those who did the shaping". ⁽⁵⁾ This argument suggests that the fight for emancipation had little to do with ordinary women outside the capital and instead, propagates the belief that only a small, select, privileged band of women was responsible for the militant struggle. On this point, it is worth considering what militancy was. Indeed, the term "militant" itself is difficult. Within the suffragette context, it is often used as a synonym for women engaged in violence and vandalism. Sometimes militancy is employed to characterise the short period of events between 1904 and 1914. However, within the accepted use of the word when dealing with the suffragettes, it tends to refer to those women who became aggressively active in support of votes for women and those who sought arrest as a means of

highlighting their case. For want of a better word, we may employ the term here to distinguish between the activities of the Women's Social and Political Union and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. As Brian Harrison noted,

This follows the Edwardian practice by applying the term suffragist to any campaigner for women's suffrage and suffragette to any woman active in the militant subsection of the suffragist category. ⁽⁶⁾

The assumption that only wealthy women were involved in the militant campaign has led not only to the distortion of the WSPU membership, but it also neglects "the significant contribution made by working-class women within it". ⁽⁷⁾

Now it is assumed that many thousands of nameless women were prepared to endure the hardship of prison and ostracism within their community in the name of women's rights. To write a wider history not only ignores the wealth of personal experiences of women who were neither famous nor important enough to influence national change, but there is also a danger that the specific dynamics of local history be neglected. This is an important omission if we are to understand the ideas and motivations of people within their own community. For it is these people who invariably seek to solve the problems of housing, poverty and other social predicaments that occur in everyday living. Further, this omission fails to chart the development and growth of local communities who were not entirely divorced from the wider picture. Indeed, there is much cross-pollination between the two as local conditions impact upon the national scene in much the same way as the national scene influences local conditions. ⁽⁸⁾

Moreover, this oversight belies the fundamental problem of how previous studies have been researched and presented. Indeed, few investigations have been carried out into local organisations of the Women's Social and Political Union and, as a consequence, our understanding of local women within the party has been retarded. This study, therefore, at its base seeks to redress the balance and add to our understanding of who were the suffragettes. Yet more importantly, this thesis seeks to investigate the contention that the

Leicester branch was, at first, unique in its make-up and different from the universal image of the middle-class suffragette. In some ways, Leah Leneman has pinpointed the problem when she argued that the

Edwardian women's suffrage movement was undeniably dominated by middle-class women. They had the time, the means and the educational background to become organisers, speakers and committee members. Yet, without doubt, there must have been a working-class component to the movement, the difficulty is in tracing it. ⁽⁹⁾

This was certainly true for Leicester, but having determined that the branch was almost certainly begun by working women as a response to their inferior position within the workplace, it became of paramount importance to determine how far the policies of the Pankhursts in London changed the complexion of the branch and to what extent the women abandoned their labour grievances in favour of the more middle-class sex-war espoused by both Christabel Pankhurst and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence. Undoubtedly, the women of Leicester had not conceived their branch in response to the sexual degradation created by the ideology of separate spheres and the double-standard morality of men. Instead, they saw the need to win the vote as a method of achieving better wages and improved working conditions for women who needed to work to alleviate poverty within the family unit. ⁽¹⁰⁾



Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst
Source, Alice Hawkins' Scrapbook.

Therefore, given the differences of approach and style between the Leicester WSPU and the WSPU in London, two major questions arise. Firstly, was the Leicester branch in

some ways unique from other WSPU branches given that many were often criticised for being middle-class, or was the Leicester experience the norm within the industrial North and Midlands, where women worked long hours in the factories. And secondly, if it was indeed an anomaly, to what extent were these women's Labour allegiances ultimately compromised by Christabel Pankhurst's rejection of ILP support?

In order to address these questions, it was necessary to compare and contrast, wherever possible, the experiences of the Leicester women with two other, fairly similar towns, Nottingham and Northampton, to see if the same variables produced a recognisable pattern within the local WSPUs. Of course, Leicester and Northampton would make an interesting study, in that, both towns towards the end of the nineteenth century were major boot and shoe centres which employed large numbers of women within the industry. At best, figures for women working in the boot and shoe industry are extremely difficult to know. In both towns, the process of outworking declined slowly and often women remained uncounted. However, according to Duncan Bythell in *The Sweated Trades; Outworkers in Nineteenth Century Britain*, figures recorded in 1911 suggest that in both Leicester and Northampton female shoe workers increased yet there were large pockets of outworkers in the surrounding areas. For example, in Leicester one-third of 33,000 workers engaged in the boot and shoe trade were still outside the town. In Northampton, the practice represented two-fifths of the 42,000 workers. According to Bythell, the official statistics of outworkers collected at the beginning of the century show just how unimportant the old domestic system was to the new manufacturing process.⁽¹¹⁾

Yet there was a real increase in the proportion of women workers in the labour force, especially as machinists in closing, a practice which continued as the trade moved into the factory at the end of the 1890s. In Leicester, for example, female employment increased from 7,320 workers in 1891 to 8,791 in 1901,⁽¹²⁾ while in Northampton, female employment increased from 3,472 to 5,936. This amounted to an extra 41% between 1881 and 1911 and corresponded well to the overall 44% increase in the female population.⁽¹³⁾

Moreover, both Northampton and Leicester had developed their economies on the back of the boot and shoe industry, despite the often held misconception that Leicester's boot and shoe manufacturing did not become established until after 1861, following a strike of shoe operators in Northampton in that year. In reality, it is possible to trace Leicester's boot and shoe trade back to 1842, when Thomas Cook ⁽⁴⁴⁾ lists in his guide and directory to the town no fewer than ninety-three boot and shoe makers compared to seventy hosiery manufacturers within the town. In the 1843 edition of Cook's guide, ⁽⁴⁵⁾ these figures grow to one hundred and thirty-eight boot and shoe makers and to eighty-four hosiery manufacturers.

In Northampton, the boot and shoe trade was established over a longer period of time and for most of the nineteenth century was centred around domestic productivity. Mechanisation was subsequently introduced in a relatively short period during the third quarter of the century. There had been, of course, machinery introduced in the late 1850s, but by and large, Northampton shoe workers were able to retain a measure of independent working. But, by 1895, a dramatic change occurred that transformed the industry from small artisan manufacturing to a centralised factory system.

According to Keith Brooker's article, *The Northampton Shoemaker's Reaction To Industrialisation*, this process was prompted by two major factors; the recurrent trade depression, exacerbated by British and foreign competition, and the need to keep manufacturing costs low. In order to increase efficiency and productivity, the need to centralise production became a paramount consideration in retaining their share of the market. Consequently, by the 1890s, Stubbs and Grinsdell became the first Northampton company to accomplish this process. They were quickly followed by Mansfield and Sons' revolutionary new factory in 1894 and G. T. Hawkins' complete machine finishing plant.

In Nottingham, on the other hand, the town was already an important textile centre that supported both framework knitting and cotton spinning industries and had long been a virile regional centre of industry and trade. ⁽⁴⁶⁾ Consequently, the largest female employers

in Nottingham were the tobacco and lace industries, and like Leicester and Northampton, mass production techniques brought about a rise in a vast army of semi - skilled women machine operators. By 1897, 75% of new factory hands were made up of female labour. This equated to around 30,000 women. ⁽¹⁷⁾ Indeed, Nottingham had as many women workers, who were subjected to the same low pay and dreadful conditions, as any other industrial areas. And like Leicester, they were exposed to the same economic and political factors that were so critical in prizing the Leicester women from the received opinions of the social and cultural systems in which they worked. Therefore it was important, before drawing any conclusions as to the unique pattern of radical feminism in Leicester to see if it happened in other towns with a similar background. But after detailed investigation, it became clear that women's militancy within the workplace was not as widespread as first thought and did not compare favourably with Leicester. Therefore, it became prudent to ask, given the exposure to poor industrial conditions, low pay and long hours, why were many women in Nottingham and Northampton so reluctant to get involved in either the trade union movement or the struggle for the vote?

In order to address problems such as these, it became significant to look, not only at the extent to which political differences within the WSPU coloured their relationship with each other, but also at how their political diversity affected their relationship with other political groups and organisations, while at the same time keeping in mind the vertical problems of how middle-class women related to working-class women and their issues. In Leicester, the Labour Party and Ramsay MacDonald should have been natural allies; after all, they could claim a common background, and while MacDonald was not entirely against the principle of votes for women he was appalled by WSPU militancy. In the end, much of the research within this study charts the infiltration of middle-class women into the Leicester WSPU, and assesses how their participation influenced and distorted the branch from its original aims and goals. But more importantly, it sought to investigate how this change affected working-class women within the branch and their relationship to it.

In Nottingham, for reasons that will be addressed later, it was found that there was no

real working-class support for the WSPU and that middle-class Liberal women formed the majority of WSPU membership. Yet, these ladies faced increasing hostility from local Liberal organisations and, more importantly, from male relations which made recruitment in its early years extremely difficult. In many ways, this hostile reaction in Nottingham was the key to the problem for both social classes, in that working women were subject to more male controls than those in Leicester. Or rather, they received little or no encouragement from those closest to them. This may go some way towards explaining why very few working women joined the organisation. As for middle-class women, the married ones at least, they were subjected to tight controls and often meetings would be conducted by husbands and fathers. ⁽¹⁸⁾

As a result, the problems faced by the local Nottingham organisation were somewhat different. Coming from a predominantly middle-class background, with little or no political antecedents, the women were faced with at least two major problems. Firstly, how could they change and adapt to the demands made of them by the Pankhursts, given their lack of political experience and male supervision? Secondly, how could they promote and encourage a greater participation of working women in the WSPU, given the conflicting signals that were coming out of the suffragette headquarters? On this point, Clement's Inn had installed a radical working-class woman to run the branch, while others, including Christabel Pankhurst, openly discouraged the assimilation of these women into the Union. It is clear, however, that their association with the WSPU later promoted and developed a wider social consciousness, that was, hitherto, lacking within these women, and once that was in place the branch grew and developed beyond the constraints of their menfolk.

In Northampton, on the other hand, the problem of understanding what was going on within the East Midlands was further complicated by the fact that neither were the members working-class, nor were they political novices. Instead, they were rounded, politically active women who would stand their ground in any political debate. However, interestingly enough, the branch did not spring into life until the end of 1911, but when it did, it was found to take a different line altogether, and while it was, for the most part,

happy to be associated with the WSPU, it vehemently refused to condone any militant action. This is interesting in itself and demonstrates a hitherto unknown factor that not all members of the WSPU were overwhelmed by the Pankhurst rhetoric. Nor were they expelled from the Union: indeed, quite the opposite appears to have been the case, as many national leaders arrived in Northampton to appeal to them directly and to keep them on board. As to the lack of working women within the organisation, many of the characteristics of the Nottingham branch were evident here, but for different reasons.

In many ways, the history of the WSPU in the East Midlands is a story of how the Pankhursts controlled and channelled the women who joined the organisation into a reflection of what they wanted the branches to be. As a consequence, the WSPU became a fertile ground for factions and dissent, and the local organisation, as well as the national union, suffered many splits and desertions. For its part, the Women's Freedom League was founded because the Pankhursts had become increasingly autocratic, and many wished to maintain ties with the ILP and the working-classes. Curiously, although a Women's Freedom League was established in Leicester, it was short lived and attracted little support.⁽¹⁹⁾ Ultimately, dissension could have become one of the WSPU's greatest assets had it been allowed to continue, but the Pankhursts, and Christabel in particular, refused to allow others either to dictate or to pursue their own policies within the organisation. In Leicester, although at first, the membership appeared to have been less compatible with the national image than their colleagues in Nottingham, and while far from being satisfied with the lack of political freedom and the ability to pursue their own agenda, the branch managed to adapt with unusual speed. Of course, there was some discord in the early stages, and the union lost some powerful and influential supporters like Edith Gittins and Margaret MacDonald,⁽²⁰⁾ but, by and large, the women who remained were in favour of their overall strategy and direction. In Nottingham, and even Northampton to some extent, this problem never really occurred.

Their affiliations to other political organisations were somewhat weaker, and therefore easier to break. But the cost of the Pankhursts' autocracy was felt in less tangible ways, and really only materialised itself in a negative way. Many potential recruits were diverted

into other, less militant groups before even joining the WSPU and often they would cite the Pankhursts, or their policies as the problem.⁽²¹⁾ One point which must be stressed is that although the WSPU had its local peculiarities, the women who stayed within the organisation adapted themselves to a national culture and came to terms with the Pankhursts' political system. However, wherever militant feminism achieved a major political influence within the branches, there was a price to pay in terms of alienating potential recruits and help from mainstream political parties.

In other ways, and this was true for all the branches, the experience of the WSPU was of immeasurable value, and did much to enhance its political growth. In Leicester, out from under the ever watchful eye of Clement's Inn, the group had a liking for revolutionary socialism, and for some time this was allowed a free rein, but under the guidance of the leadership in London and the arrival of a paid organiser, they were exposed, however unwillingly, to other viewpoints and directions which meant that policy priorities often shifted. Consequently, it is here that the gap between their local ambitions and the goal of only seeking votes for women on a single platform can be found. Again, in Nottingham, this problem never arose. The policy of votes for women was an enabling issue that would allow all other reforms to stem from it. From the start, there was no other agenda to pursue or develop, and more importantly, there were no political objectives to suppress. As a result, the experiences gained from the WSPU would lead to a more radical feminism that would seek its outlet in a more aggressive manner.

In contrast to the excitement of the early years, the middle period, was one of calm and careful reassessment for both the national and local movements, and while the Nottingham branch appeared to sink into inaction and lethargy, the women of Leicester undertook a lengthy campaign of recruiting more women into the local trade union movement. As Fox has quite rightly pointed out in his study, *A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives*,⁽²²⁾ these women were now fighting a sex-war with the men. In this brutal assessment of the women's intentions and motives, there lies a powerful combination of male logic and political assumptions that leads the reader to believe these women were little more than trouble-makers bent on diverting the work of

the union to make positive discriminations in their favour.

Although Fox's view was progressive for its time, it now fails to fully assess their aims and goals. Examples like this have often clouded the view and denied the extent to which these women were exploited, both in the home and at work. However, in this case, to speak only of somebody as being a victim of exploitation, and not as being oppressed because they were women, fails to focus on the lives of ordinary women. It is important, therefore, not to look at women in terms of their political or social backgrounds, but how they were being treated as women.

To some extent, Alice Hawkins more than understood this concept and attacked at every opportunity the reluctance of men to include women in all aspects of social and political life. By 1911, she was painfully conscious that the moment that had beckoned her was one to which her whole life had been pointing. Since she had joined the trade union movement, she had expected much and received little from her male colleagues. She had worked tirelessly on behalf of the women of Leicester, but little had come of this energy. Thus, when the negotiations had reached their final schism, the formation of an independent female union seemed to offer liberation from male hypocrisy and inertia. But to what extent was Alice Hawkins' radicalism home-grown or developed by the Pankhurst experience? Or does a person's evolution demand that he or she be encompassed in a wider circle of experience and exposure to a more radical way of thinking? In some respects, the answer is both and the transformation that Alice Hawkins underwent as a suffragette certainly motivated her trade union activity, but only up to a point. Her work with the trade union movement was never fully left behind, and in some ways, this attitude coloured the activity of the rest of the branch. Thus, while it might be prudent to ask if she was being influenced by the WSPU, it is certainly true that she influenced the WSPU, even if it was only at a local level.

Motivated by the rejection of the Conciliation Bill towards the end of 1911, the WSPU in the East Midlands entered into its final and most militant phase. Spurred on by the escalating sex-war, both Nottingham and Leicester entered into acts of arson, letter-box

destruction and other acts of vandalism, whilst Northampton, though not opposed to the ultimate aims of the WSPU, because of their radical, nonconformist background, steadfastly refused to take up arms against the Liberals. Of course, the different operations undertaken by the various unions had major repercussions on all branches in terms of reaction from other political organisations, and while Northampton was able to retain the support of the Trades' Council, and the Labour Party (they were also supported by the local Liberal Association), Nottingham and Leicester remained ostracised and alone.

In the end, there was nothing inevitable in the way in which the branches would develop, and despite the constant intervention in policy made by the Pankhursts in London, each was individual and unique to its area. However, authoritarianism permeated the WSPU from top to bottom and was heavily relied upon to bring about changes in the behaviour and attitudes of local women. In Leicester, the women who were the WSPU were certainly distinct in the early years, but pressure from London was too great, and while the branch suffered a setback in its campaign to recruit more working women, the group, as a whole, like Nottingham, went on to play an important part in the wider agitation.

In many respects, the suffragettes' fight for the franchise in the shires and industrial centres of the Midlands was no different from any other well-documented groups, like the Women's Freedom League and the London WSPU, who struggled for the right to political emancipation within the capital. Yet, to date, as it has been pointed out, little attention has been paid to the women who joined the organisation and remained outside the small band of women revolving around the Pankhursts in London. Their presence was no less important, and indeed, they undoubtedly added to the WSPU's colour and make-up. Yet, more importantly, they were the sum of its character and strength for, without the loyal supporters around the country, little could have been done to make the life of the politician difficult.

In countless towns and boroughs around Britain, local women harassed and harangued Cabinet Ministers and local MPs in the name of "Votes For Women" and none more so

than within the East Midlands. Indeed between May 1907 and June 1914, nearly fifty incidents occurred. In Leicester and Nottingham, Herbert Asquith, Winston Churchill and Ramsay MacDonald all fell foul of this campaign. In common with the textile workers around the Lancashire cotton towns, the rise of a new breed of industrial women workers made the area a potential breeding ground for recruits to the new, dynamic Women's Social and Political Union. Therefore, it becomes prudent to ask, what use did the Pankhursts make of these women?

One of the tasks of this study was, therefore, conceived as being able to depict the WSPU as both a local and national organisation that had a major influence on all who came into contact with it. Further, it was also important to give some account of the great events which occurred during this unsettling period before the Great War and which formed the background to many of these women's thoughts and actions. With some of these events, however, the local women were not always directly identified, but it is important to provide a broad outline of what the problems were. No local study could be undertaken without reference to the hegemony of the national leadership in Clement's Inn. Often intangible events within the East Midlands could only be explained within this wider context. After all, the Pankhursts were, to all intents and purposes, the WSPU and any policies introduced by the triumvirate in London would have a profound effect on all the branches.

While the work of Roger Fulford ⁽²³⁾ and Andrew Rosen ⁽²⁴⁾ has undoubtedly expanded our knowledge of the women's campaign to get the vote, they are now somewhat dated. However, they are important in that they clearly demonstrate the problems of this type of research. Both works focused entirely on the national movement, with little or no acknowledgment of the work done within the shire counties. In *Rise Up Women*, ⁽²⁵⁾ Rosen explored in great detail the highly unusual characters and careers of two women, who between them established, then evolved, a movement that increasingly centred on their own personalities. Consequently, because of the dominant influence which Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel were to have on the suffrage question, Rosen is quite right to explore the inner citadels of the WSPU and analyse the effects of

Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst on the wider movement. But, while these investigations are important in explaining why the WSPU developed the use of militant tactics, they failed to explore the impact these policies had on local branches around the country. Further, according to Michelle Mayall, ⁽²⁶⁾ Rosen's belief that the WSPU was a predominantly middle-class organisation and that its split with the Labour Party in 1907 marked the end of the involvement of working women was clearly wrong. Instead, it falls to local studies like this to ask, given that working women were clearly involved, to what extent were local women free to explore their own agenda, based on their own local experiences and needs?

Other works, notably David Mitchell's *Queen Christabel*, ⁽²⁷⁾ and more recently Sandra Holton's *Suffrage Days*, ⁽²⁸⁾ continue to demonstrate the lack of interest by most historians in the WSPU at a regional level. In many ways this is a serious gap in women's history, as we now know the WSPU was far more than just one family's attempt to win the vote for all women. Outside London, thousands of quiet and respectable women toiled out of the limelight, not only to raise substantial amounts of money for the cause by self-denial weeks, but also to put the question of women's suffrage at the top of the political agenda. Yet, while it is fair to suggest that this area of the WSPU's history has been somewhat overlooked, some historians, while not actually doing the research, have noted its absence. For example, in Les Garner's book, *Stepping Stones To Women's Liberty*, ⁽²⁹⁾ he points out that although the Union was deliberately centred on London, more local studies are needed to determine the bulk of who these women were.

On closer inspection, Garner's suggestion is more than valid, for without this wider investigation into the movement, little can be concluded. Questions remain as to, not only who these women were, but also what was their social background? Surprisingly, and without wider evidence to substantiate this claim, to date virtually all books on the subject conclude that the WSPU was a predominantly middle-class organisation based in London. While this might be true on a superficial level, without further evidence it can have little relevance to the bulk of the membership away from the centre. As Juliet

Mitchell argued in *Women's Estate*,⁽³⁰⁾ it has always been misleading to assume that the fight for the vote was led by the middle-class. But this has always been the case because the majority of its leaders came from the educated middle-class.

Now it is slowly being recognised by historians like Leah Leneman,⁽³¹⁾ and David Neville⁽³²⁾ that history cannot shut away the lives and experiences of thousands of women to concentrate on what was, to all intents and purposes, the public sphere. If women's history, as Brian Harrison maintained at a seminar at Leicester University in 1983,⁽³³⁾ is a transitional stage towards a wider history, then it follows that it needs to take a wider picture of itself. As Sheila Rowbotham argues in *Hidden From History*,⁽³⁴⁾ the lack of comprehensive evidence is an important omission, and without it, the social composition of the movement will always remain unclear and the extent to which working women were involved will always remain hidden from history. Of course, in some ways the historical debate put forward by Rowbotham and others has been shaped by their concerns as Marxist historians to highlight the involvement of working class women within this organisation; however, little has been done to try and rectify the situation.

This is an important point, for any answers put forward by such studies might mean that a complete reassessment of the WSPU is needed. However, in some respects, this reassessment has already begun. In 1978, Jill Liddington and Jill Norris published their classic in-depth look at working women's involvement in the suffrage campaign in the North of England. As they point out, the evidence collated within their book, *One hand Tied Behind Us*,⁽³⁵⁾ helps to dispute the Pankhursts' version of the early suffrage movement. Indeed, not only did it bring to the fore of women's history the notion that local principles and tactics differed from the national leadership, but more importantly, it helped challenge the view that women's suffrage was largely a middle-class concern. Unfortunately for our purpose, the work focused primarily on the women textile workers in the North East, and had little or nothing to say about the WSPU after 1907, nor indeed about the contribution that local women might have had on the organisation. Evidence gleaned from local research suggests that working women not only played an important role in the formation of local WSPUs but also provided a significant role model for many

young, middle-class women coming into the organisation.

To some extent, this assumption had already been made in the 1960s when Marian Ramelson published her study, *Petticoat Rebellion*.³⁶ What she discovered from her research suggests that there had been a long tradition of working women being involved in the different suffrage organisations and campaigns. Indeed, what she found underpins the assumption made by Liddington and Norris over ten years later that many male trade unionists and Labour Party members refused to support or even recognise the good these organisations could do. Instead, these predominantly male dominated groups sought to alienate women from not only working within the industrial sphere but also within the campaigns of trade unions and various Labour movements set up to secure equal rights. While this, of course, might have been generally true, it is still a sweeping statement that neglects local variety and colour and, again, the value of local investigations is self-evident as the evidence suggests that there were many local ILP members who rejected the official line.

In both Leicester and Northampton, local ILP members not only actively supported the WSPU at grass-roots level, they also defended their interests in local trades' councils and local government. However, while this intervention was more than welcome, often the hostility towards militant feminism would come from the rank and file of male employees on the shop floor and trade unionists seeking to restrict the use of cheap female labour. For them, the problem was manifestly twofold. Not only did women keep wages artificially low by supplying cheap labour, they also occupied a job that could have been done by a man. They argued, with some justification, that while some households received two wages when both the husband and wife worked, many households received none when the husband could not find work. On this point the solution was clear, the priority of work must fall to the man, then all households might, at least, receive one wage, and then the union might have a claim to argue for a higher rate as the men have wives and children to support.

It was on this problem of male hostility to women workers within the trade union

movement that the first suggestions of a Leicester suffragette movement were uncovered in an unexpected way. In an extensive *History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives*, Alan Fox ⁽³⁷⁾ outlined the rise and consequent struggle of a section of working women within the union, who not only strove to gain recognition for their grievances, but also fought to achieve the unthinkable goal of equal pay and better working conditions for all working women. These women, while faced with personal rejection and even ridicule, felt confident enough to start their own independent union in 1911. But something of the attitude of the men within the boot and shoe union can be seen in the irrelevance Alan Fox puts upon the women's movement at that time. Of course, while accepting the women's union had some justification and that it was not entirely connected with a few fanatics engaged in a sex-war against all men, he concluded that it was merely a nuisance, or at best, a sideshow that diverted attention away from the Union's major concern of attaining higher wages for the men so they could keep their wives and children in reasonable conditions.

In some respects, while Alan Fox's assumption that the women's agitation within Leicester's boot and shoe industry needed to be seen against the back-drop of the wider suffragette movement is correct, he somewhat missed the point when he suggested that these women were influenced by a wider pattern of agitation rather than being an important part of it. But it is worth noting that trade union militancy within these women originally fed suffrage expectations; however, suffragette activity led to a more dynamic trade union militancy around 1911. The exceptional militancy of the Leicester women was largely due to the dynamic personalities of some of the local women, like Alice Hawkins, Bertha Clark and Lizzie Willson. Equally important was the encouragement and open support of many male workers within the radical concept of co-op manufacture. Their radicalism was essentially a local phenomenon and was generated from inside the Labour movement.

II

The process of collecting and collating material for this study was surprisingly difficult, in

that much of the material was hidden from view and had to be found. None of the national archives consulted held records that directly related to any of the branches in Leicester, Northampton or Nottingham. Secondly, and this was primarily true for Leicester, previous researchers had sought in vain for these women amongst the middle-classes, when, in reality they were, initially, to be found in the factories and workshops engaged in boot and shoe manufacture.

Consequently, from this unique starting point it was a relatively simple matter of advertising in the regional papers for local information. However, what was to turn up surpassed all expectations when the granddaughter of Alice Hawkins, one of Leicester's leading members, produced her scrapbook. When Alice Hawkins died in 1946, at the age of 83, a local newspaper, *The Leicester Evening Mail* proclaimed that she was Leicester's only working-class suffragette. Yet information gleaned from other sources, including Sylvia Pankhurst's *The Suffragette Movement*,⁽³⁸⁾ originally published in 1931, suggested otherwise. She intimated that as early as 1907 the Leicester branch was entirely made up of working women, and even painted at least two pastel watercolours of these women working in a local co-op boot and shoe factory, the *Equity* on Western Road in Leicester.

There was a rich source of information to be found in local newspapers and all the publications in Leicester considered the local suffragettes to be of such worth as to document their progress from 1907 to 1914. Within the pages of these newspapers were not only accounts of their meetings but also their letters and interviews with reporters. Further, they were considered to be of such newsworthy merit that many other commentators felt the need to add to the rich flow of information. The extent of this coverage is sharply contrasted to other provincial newspapers, like the *Nottingham Guardian*, who only sought to mention their local WSPU when something dramatic occurred.

Consequently, in Nottingham and Northampton, the information was more difficult to come by and, despite the large collection of speeches and other documents left by Helen

Watts, a young middle-class suffragette, much use had to be made of the sparse and erratic information contained within local and suffragette newspapers to supply the names of those involved. Indeed, after the campaign was wound up in 1914, few of these women thought themselves important enough to record or document their group in any real detail. It appeared that these women left little, if any, significant evidence regarding their activities within the organisation. Of course, the fact that in later years the organisation became secretive and little was written down only hampered the investigation further.

As it has already been pointed out, a detailed search of all the local newspapers was needed and it was ultimately possible to use media accounts as evidence regarding incidents and disorder. Without doubt, this was useful, despite the fact that the selection of newsworthy material was often not only distorted to fit a stereotypical image demanded by their readers, but was also frequently used to promote the newspaper's own particular brand of social remedies when dealing with political agitation and public disorder, none more so than the *Nottingham Guardian* where any political protest was seen as an infringement of Liberal democracy. However, that does not necessarily render the source material historically insignificant, for when the bias has been detected it has within itself an historical importance that needs to be noted. For example, in the case of the *Nottingham Guardian*, a shift in public opinion was clearly detected and it allowed this researcher to gauge the mood and tenor of the times and to explain why the WSPU's reputation suffered as it entered into its more militant campaign after 1912.

But more importantly, all the regional newspapers were able to supply a list of names of the many activists who could be tracked down later by other means, notably local directories, advertising in local newspapers and by making appeals on local radio stations. For married women this task was somewhat easier for they had the names of their husbands and they could often be found in local directories like *White's* and *Kelly's*. Without doubt the task would have been easier had access to the 1911 Census been available but this document is still restricted. However, by collating the meagre evidence from local directories and by placing their residences within a local context, it was

possible to determine social class, or at least the social class of their husbands or fathers. In Leicester, on the other hand, a relatively short-lived socialist newspaper, *The Pioneer* considered the movement to be of such interest that it recorded in some detail the early years of the WSPU within the town.

Of course, not all questions could be answered from newspaper articles, but they were a good pointer to other source materials, like the Leicester Police Watch Committee reports and the archives in the Fawcett Library in London. Access to these files would have been pointless without knowing the names of the people involved, as much of the information contained in the library would name names, but, more often than not, not mention localities. Consequently, what we can learn from a set of unrelated source materials is not only confined to their explicit meaning but enables the researcher to draw conclusions and inferences by using the critical method. However, given the problems of historical research and subsequent attempts at an analysis, it is tempting to believe that we can never fully know the past and no matter how we might try and explain social and political motivations externally observed through empirical research such as this we can never produce answers as to what goes on in the minds of these women.

For arguably, their ambitions and their understanding of the world moulded and shaped their strategies for achieving their wants. Yet by trying to unravel this aspect of their personalities, the research inevitably introduced subjectivity into historical inquiry. But a rounded view, or total history is impossible to achieve without some attention to how human experience and the human condition are linked to actions. Indeed, many of the suffragettes' own metaphors of an organic society demonstrated their own attempts to go beyond a crude view of their world and to see how individuals fit into a wider pattern of human consciousness. This is an important point, for any kind of an opinion of the world clearly coloured their environment and acted as a catalyst for their actions. By doing this, these women highlighted the problem of believing that study and research generates its own laws and warns the historian against accumulating factual knowledge at the expense of other source material such as emotion and a particular state of mind.

As E. H Carr has noted in *What Is History?* ⁽³⁹⁾ we can “arrive at no real understanding either of the past or the present if we operate with the concept of an abstract individual standing outside society.” ⁽⁴⁰⁾ Instead, it might well be argued that human events must be seen in a broader light and that history, or the chronological chain of events, once mapped out, cannot be fully understood without reference to the “mental” dimension of the human character. Of course, interpretations, facts and generalisations can be made to explain how the past could be understood, but all history is about human activity and humans are subjective within their own time and space. Consequently their emotions are as important as their actions. Again to quote Carr,

Human beings do not always, or perhaps even habitually, act from motives of which they are fully conscious or which they are willing to avow, and to exclude insight into unconscious or unavowed motives is surely a way of going about one’s work with one eye wilfully shut. ⁽⁴¹⁾

As a result, memoirs, newsletters, newspapers and books written by the suffragettes, like Sylvia Pankhurst’s *The Suffragette Movement* proved to be of value.

But does this mean we can trust the people involved to give a full and honest account of their actions, given that they were there and privy to their own emotions? No, of course not. Eye-witness evidence has also to be subjected to internal criticism and questions have to be asked whether the writer was in a position to give a faithful record, especially when the events were written down some years later and priorities somewhat shifted. Indeed, the old adage, “the older we get, the better we were” springs to mind. Further, the newspapers, *The Suffragette* and *Votes For Women* were always meant as vehicles for propaganda and unashamedly presented a biased view, even at the time. For, without doubt, they often only contained what the leadership deemed fit for public consumption and often left out any facts that were deemed damning to the organisation.

Yet this does not render them totally useless, as the bias itself has historical relevance in that it informs the reader of the ways in which individuals and, indeed, social groups like

the WSPU assimilated and interpreted their own experience, and this is at the heart of our own political culture. Further, they are important source documents for the simple fact that they recorded political and social events as they unfolded and it is this accumulation of experience that shaped and influenced their lives. Moreover, *Votes For Women* contained many listings of demonstrations and gatherings that not only helped signpost the growth of the movement but also gave an indication of what to look for in other source documents.

For example, when it was known that the suffragettes conducted a demonstration with several arrests, it is a relatively small matter to check the provincial press reports for local women who had been arrested, and from that it was possible to locate their ages, occupations and addresses. But more importantly, it was feasible to note their levels of activity and, indeed, their level of commitment to the cause.

III

In the interests of clarity, it is necessary to explain some of the meanings attached to many of the terms used, like class and radical feminism, and precisely how these labels are measured. It is widely accepted that the problem of defining meaning within a historical context is the difficulty faced by all present-day historians. Of course, they include the need to devise and ground a conception of truth which will be as adequate to the new historical modes of knowing as they were seen in their own time, but they also need to include a synthesis between meaning and understanding which are both seen by later historians as relevant, and must link up to the way in which all people increasingly experience their lives. Thus, when trying to predetermine what constituted radical feminism at the turn of the century, historians are confronted with the greatest of difficulties because the definition of radical feminism not only changed as the century progressed, it also changed between different people and different ideologies. Indeed, some of the ambiguity in the term stems from the fact that it was used in different, but partially overlapping ways.

For example, before the First World War, there were conflicting differences of opinion in the approach to feminism as defined by early radicals like Alice Hawkins, and later, Christabel Pankhurst. For Alice Hawkins, her radicalism was a traditional radical feminism for the turn of the century and really only sought to demand access into a world controlled by men, by demanding equal rights at work, equal rights in education and, of course, the vote. In some ways this might also be seen as the classic proletariat view espoused by a male political organisation, but the demands for reform made by Alice Hawkins appear to reflect her experiences within the workplace. She neither had the leisure nor the education to define her feminism around her biology. Yet that does not mean to say that the problems of contraception and family allowances were beyond her scope, it had more to do with the fact that the Labour movement had yet to define its policy on such matters.

However, Christabel was to bring to the movement an altogether different approach. She forced into the political debate a focus on women's biological and sexual oppression. This "new feminism" insisted on a real equality and, as Sheila Rowbotham acknowledges in *A New World For Women. Stella Browne - Social Feminist* ⁽⁴²⁾ this not only meant challenging a male dominated culture, it also meant recognising the specific predicaments of women. Not only was the new agenda demanding better protection for women at work, it also sought to take command of birth control, abortion and sexual freedom from male exploitation. At the heart of the matter, militancy lay principally in showing new ways of being a woman and its rhetoric appealed directly to the new Edwardian woman. Obviously this was more than just a doctrine of equal rights for women; at its best it set out to redefine a woman's role, not only in the home but also in the wider, social, economic and political sphere of men.

Nor was it entirely political in its aims. For without doubt, though the vote was important to the WSPU within the East Midlands, and especially to the working-class members of the organisation, more importantly, it was increasingly to become a protest against what women were in the hearts and minds of men. But this campaign in the high citadels of the Pankhurst organisation was, in many ways, flawed. At no point could the national

leadership come to terms with social class, nor could it “define itself, except in terms of the dominant group.” ⁽⁴³⁾ Although the concern for working women's rights was a genuine one, the feminist concept at this time consistently failed to provide the framework for real change or social emancipation which could include all women, from all social backgrounds. The working women of Leicester certainly felt this, and after a time left the reforming umbrella of the WSPU to seek another outlet for their ambitions, and latent trade unionism.

For Rowbotham, although radical feminism articulated the way in which women could see themselves, it nevertheless, blurred the real contradictions within the movement. At no point could it achieve, in real terms, the possibility of change for the housewife or the exploited women at work. In some ways, the experience of the working women of Nottingham proves the point. Dominated at home and in the workplace, the campaigns for the vote attracted few working women, and what support they might volunteer was entirely passive. They lacked the financial independence to stand up for themselves and make themselves unpopular. Nor was it only the working-class members who were to feel alienated by Christabel's policies, for in Nottingham and Northampton, the women within the organisation rejected the sex war as unworkable. One Nottingham WSPU member advocated to her fellow-members that they study politics in order that they might be fit to take their place as responsible citizens. “There must be no sex war,” she warned them, “for if they allow that to creep in, then.... our efforts would be worse than useless.” ⁽⁴⁴⁾

As a growing number of women became more class-conscious, organised and militant, they increasingly saw themselves shaped by the reproductive process rather than by the rounded needs of human personality. As Susan Kent quite rightly points out in *Sex and Suffrage in Britain* ⁽⁴⁵⁾ an important key to understanding the persistence of feminist agitation lies in “analysing not only the social and economic developments of the nineteenth century, but the ideological developments as well.” ⁽⁴⁶⁾ Throughout the period, the leadership of the WSPU consistently provided the necessary ideologues to help the membership understand their own experiences and the aims and tasks of the struggle. The

movement's leadership itself learnt to organise the Union and mastered the art, at least in the early years, to control and set the political and sexual agenda by dictating popular opinion amongst many women. Indeed, as late as 1913, Emmeline Pankhurst proclaimed in a speech that prostitution was a metaphor of the position of all women and that "it was, perhaps, the main reason for militancy."⁽⁴⁷⁾

The Pankhursts understood only too well that new theoretical perceptions of what women could, and should be, would only be worked out by creating and developing a parallel view of a woman's sphere of influence. By 1912, they had managed, through Christabel's views on male double standards, to develop a scientific breadth, and, a theoretical depth that would give many middle-class women the courage to leave home in search of a new identity. Indeed, such was the Pankhursts' influence, that the movement brought into prominence many personalities who made their mark in the chronicles of women's thought. Needless to say, the age itself generated the need for such personalities, and despite the obvious differences in gender, the metaphor is still the same as Hegel's maxim that "the great man of the age is the one who can put into words the will of his age."⁽⁴⁸⁾ But they were not individuals prone to penis envy, battling against the immovable bastions of male privilege, they were women who refused to be defined essentially in terms of their biology and would no longer consent to be passive victims of male sexual tyranny.

However, there are problems of over-generalisation and some feminist writers, like Betty Friedman,⁽⁴⁹⁾ have argued that early feminists not only had to fight the concept that they were violating God's nature of women, but also had to deal with clergymen interrupting women's rights meetings. However, while this might have been true in some places, it certainly was not true of women's meetings in the East Midlands. In both Leicester and Nottingham, the Church actively supported the suffrage movement and forged links with them through organisations like the Church League for Women's Suffrage. * In Leicester and Nottingham, WSPU members like Dorothy Pethick and Elsa Oswald, encompassed

* This organisation was formed in December 1909 and sought to promote moral, social and the industrial well-being of the community.

both worlds with equal commitment, and indeed, were matched with equal passion from church leaders and clergymen alike. Unfortunately, much of this solidarity was to be lost in the eruption of militancy after 1912, and relationships, certainly in Nottingham, were strained to breaking-point when churches were attacked and burnt down.

IV

Finally, throughout this study, an attempt has been made to identify and establish the social class of the women who took part in the Women's Social and Political Union. This background is more than important if we wish to test the assumption that working women were important members of the WSPU at a regional level and, more importantly, to see if the Nottingham and Northampton branches were of the same social make-up as the Leicester Union. Moreover, in order to fully understand the motivations, desires and ultimately the reasons for joining the WSPU, some understanding of their backgrounds is much needed. It is pertinent, for their starting point, or where they stood in society would often determine the ambitions they had for the WSPU.

For example, the reason for securing the vote in Nottingham and Northampton was profoundly different from that of the Leicester women. For each, the prospect of obtaining the vote gave different expectations, and, whereas working women saw it as a vehicle to better pay and conditions within the workplace, middle-class women saw it as a means of securing independence to follow their own ambitions. Yet this goal of determining social class, however desired, was not always easy to achieve. For their part, the women in this study never really spelt out their own backgrounds, and the social structure of England is much too complicated for easy classification. The Marxist prediction that social and economic class relations would break up into two distinct groups never occurred.

The development of a complex industrial system followed a different course. Between the Proletariat and the Bourgeoisie there grew a professional class who were independent of market forces. As Perkin argued in *The Origins Of Modern Society*,⁽⁵⁰⁾ since they were

independent of market forces, they were able to develop their own ideas of efficiency and service to the rest of the community. Further, this section of the community was also one of the fastest growing sectors of the population. According to Guy Routh in his book *Occupations And Pay In Great Britain 1906 - 1979*, ⁽⁵¹⁾ this stratum rose from 4.05% of the employed population in 1911 to 11.07% in 1971 mainly as a result of the growth of specialised occupations in industry.

They fought, not for control of economic power, but for control of the state itself, through parliamentary reform. Interestingly enough, another aspect of social class requires attention. There was an unusually small proportion of the middle-classes in Leicester. In the 1871 Census, ⁽⁵²⁾ only 6% of the total labour force (male and females over the age of 20) in Leicester consisted of those who were in Class 1 (Professional) and Class 111 (Commercial). Whereas in Nottingham, that figure was 8.6%. By 1891, the figure in Leicester had fallen to 4.1%. When comparing this to Nottingham alone, the latter had 302 more than the former in the professional classes in 1871 and 1,936 more in 1891. The fact that this is related to the participation of the social groups in the WSPU is interesting, but any correlation between the two is highly subjective.

For Marx, social classes were rooted in the systems of production, by the fact that different groups stood in different relations to the means of production, and had different interests in it, and, by and large, politically active people assumed their social position within its broad framework. But what people may or may not think their social class is, is entirely subjective. No longer is it admissible to regularly presuppose a class identity “stamped unambivalently on the individual through her or his position in the relations of production.” ⁽⁵³⁾ There is much wrong with this type of reductionist history because politically constructed identities are partly the result of imaginary identifications and, as such, we need to move away from predetermined concepts of the political subject and political allegiance constructed around a unified identity and a rational calculation of interest. For many individuals within this study, it is difficult to make sense of political obligation to the Labour Party through a rational computation of interest. Nor is it wise to assume that commitment to the Liberal or the Conservative Party by working men and

women is an irrational false consciousness.

Instead, identification with any one political party and the person's subjectivity of their own social class are inherently incoherent, as there is, according to sociologists, a categorical distinction between phenomenal social identity and its epiphenomenical political representation. Instead, class identification is constructed between the real and the desired. This tells the researcher, not what social class a person belongs to, but what class they think they belong to. In Leicester, for example, Alice Hawkins maintained a working-class concept of herself all her life, and to some degree she was right, but it is important to bear in mind that there was a high degree of class-consciousness throughout the female workforce of Leicester and she was undoubtedly influenced by this. Almost from the start, the process of mechanisation within the boot and shoe trade created a new set of political ambitions within its workforce that centred on the demand for legislative control of wages and terms of employment. As a consequence, throughout the East Midlands working women, alongside their male colleagues were flexing their industrial muscles in tandem with trade union action.

There were, of course, deep structural divisions within the working-class itself that prevented the development of a widespread, cohesive class-consciousness, that in turn restricted the development of working-class politics at this time. Consequently, it was from the skilled and unionised craftsmen that the ILP and other political organisations drew the majority of their working-class support. Without doubt, Alice Hawkins was part of this movement, and as such presented herself to the world as a manifestation of the qualities and characteristics valued by this group. Yet in Northampton this distinction between the classes became decidedly unclear. To assume that a member of the WSPU was working-class because her husband was a foreman in a local boot and shoe factory is a case in point. Mr Albert Tebbutt was certainly that, but what does he become when it is known that his father owned the factory? The differentiation within the classes becomes even further blurred when it becomes obvious that the factory was a small, family-based producer, set up by people who were from an ordinary working-class background. As G D H Cole believed,

Marx put no stress on the possibility that this concentration of control over production might proceed side by side with a diffusion of ownership among a growing number of small share - and bond-holders who would receive among them a large proportion of the profits of production. ⁽⁵⁴⁾

Yet in all other respects, regardless of their backgrounds, they took on, what Perkin saw as a middle-class status, those of "the Gentleman" and of "respectability" ⁽⁵⁵⁾ thus making it possible for men (and women) of different social backgrounds to co-operate together in politics and public affairs. But as Gray and Crossick suggested in *Social History*, ⁽⁵⁶⁾ working-class respectability was a complex, ambiguous phenomenon, and was not, as both Foster and other reductionist historians would have it, ultimately a collaborationist capitulation to bourgeois values instigated by an influential labour aristocracy.

This complexity, outlined by Gray and Crossick, was certainly the case in Northampton. "Respectable" working-class trade unionists within the Trades' Council actively co-operated with Liberal Councillors to maintain a fair balance between the interests of Capital and Labour rather than indulge in a Marxist class war. However, this should hardly be surprising when it is remembered that Northampton was, by tradition, Liberal Radical rather than Radical Chartist in its politics. Indeed, from the 1880s through to 1914, trade union activity was low within the town and many local working-class shoemakers, especially within the West Ward, had long voted Liberal giving Charles Bradlaugh a potentially powerful base from which to secure an alliance between orthodox Liberals and nonconformist Radicals. ⁽⁵⁷⁾

In many respects this ideology was transferred to the local WSPU and this raises questions, of course, about their wider social backgrounds. Most were either married to prominent Liberals, or their fathers were "respectable gentlemen". At first glance it is easy to assume they were of a middle-class background, but this assumption says little of their own concept of class. For example, one of the WSPU's leading members was married to Mr Herbert Branch, who owned a small shoe factory in Henry Street, and was for many

years a leading member of the Northampton Liberal Association. ⁽⁵⁸⁾ From this it is easy to assume that Mrs Branch, a one-time officer in the Women's Liberal Association was middle-class, but from snippets of speeches that she made, it is quite clear that she saw herself as a working woman. ⁽⁵⁹⁾ Whereas Mrs Cockerill, wife of a wealthy landowner, who lived in the Thatched Farm in Abington Park, certainly saw herself as middle-class. However, her husband had started life as a poor farm labourer and had made his money buying up small parcels of land to cultivate fruit and vegetables. When he died in 1927, at the age of eighty-five, he was an alderman of the borough. ⁽⁶⁰⁾

As it has been pointed out, in order to gain a picture of various aspects of the different personalities, this study is primarily interested in the relationship between the local membership and national leaders, and constructs a picture of individual political convictions and their influence on a person's behaviour. Of course, it might well be argued that a woman's commitment to a political organisation such as this had little to do with personality characteristics, and more to do with convictions based on material interests determined by class considerations. But much of the evidence suggests that personality and individual characteristics had much to do with how national and local branches developed and behaved.

This is all the more important when it is realised that there frequently was an interaction between the two, and often the strength and reliability of a member's involvement was generally determined by the response of the leadership in London. But equally, the leadership's involvement in the struggle cannot be fully understood without reference to the wider organisation and only when we see their decisions being taken in the light of local pressures, can we fully understand the dynamics that underpinned the Women's Social and Political Union. The local story of the East Midlands is, then, crucial to our understanding of the organisation.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

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Chapter Two

RADICAL TRADITIONS AND PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES WITHIN THE EAST MIDLANDS BEFORE 1907

In the politically turbulent years between the death of Queen Victoria and the out-break of the First World War, the old, reassuring constraints of Victorian Britain were very near to collapse and to historians, like Dangerfield, ⁽¹⁾ England appeared to be tottering on the brink of revolution. In Ireland, civil war seemed increasingly likely, while in England, the gulf between rich and poor stoked the fires of militant trade unionism and brought the nation to the precipice of a general strike. Yet, despite the rhetoric of those turbulent years, no political reform group is identified more with Edwardian Britain than that of the suffragettes. Without doubt, the image of the middle-class suffragette chained to the railings outside No 10 Downing Street, rebelling against the legacy of Victorian double standards and the inferior position of women within society, has always been a powerful icon to later generations of militant feminists. However, this vision was, by and large, instigated by the Pankhursts' Women's Social and Political Union. Not content with following in the footsteps of other, older suffrage societies, the WSPU embarked on a long and often violent suffrage campaign that not only highlighted the problems faced by many women, but also repelled the many influential people of power and respectability who might have helped. But what they undoubtedly did was to stamp an indelible image of the "Shrieking Sisterhood" on the collective minds of the population as a whole.

Such images, however, had a much wider implication, in that the perception of middle-class women in full revolt effectively concealed the scope and depth to which working-class women were involved in the militant campaign. But, in order to analyse the extent to which these women were involved within the WSPU, it is necessary to trace and identify, wherever possible, the existence of a working-class feminist radical and philosophical tradition within the East Midlands to see if there is any link between an old militant,

feminist tradition and the participation of working women within the WSPU.

This investigation is central to the study, in that it allows all the women identified to be placed into a wider context and makes clear the histories and influences that shaped their lives. This is a salient point, for it is important to remember that their radicalism was not spontaneous and owed much to an established ideology and self-image that was prevalent at the time. In view of the undeniable correlation between feminist movements before 1904 and the WSPU, additional perspectives have to be admitted, for only when the structures, and indeed constraints of Victorian society have been placed in context will it be systematically possible to throw light on the connections and evolution of the women's movement. Their economic and philosophical development within the various women's groups, like the local Women's Co-operative Guild and the various political affiliation groups around the turn of the century were of immense value in developing their feminist views. At this point, it might well be worth dwelling on what constituted the militant campaign. Before Emmeline Pankhurst formed the WSPU in 1903, much of the suffrage campaign was conducted through constitutional organisations like the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies who petitioned Parliament every year, and the Women's Co-operative Guild, who passed a resolution in 1904 supporting full adult suffrage. But from 1904 onwards, women under the guidance and direction of Christabel Pankhurst undertook a proactive campaign of militancy that progressed from heckling Government Ministers to acts of vandalism upon public buildings and the destruction of private property by arson.

The activities of the suffragette acolytes revolving around the Pankhursts in London have been well documented and, as such, when reading accounts of the women's struggle for the vote in Edwardian England, the reader might well be forgiven for believing that the suffrage campaign in general, and the Pankhursts' Women's Social and Political Union in particular, were predominantly middle-class institutions confined to the capital with little or no reference to the rest of the country. However, to understand the movement more fully, a wider picture is often needed and this can only be achieved by studying at a local level the histories and motivations behind the women involved. Then, and only then

will we be "better able to trace the political origins of the agitators and understand the experiences which brought women to the suffrage cause." ⁽²⁾

It is important to note that the upsurge in trade unionism was not entirely distinct from the suffragettes, for many women trade unionists had come to see the struggle for the vote as their best palliative for improving low wages and bad working conditions. But to what extent were working women throughout the industrial towns within the East Midlands active in the campaigns of the WSPU? Indeed, not only is it important to ask how dominant were provincial women in setting local agendas, but also, were their strategies and tactics different from those in London? None were more suited to the work, for they were often more able to understand the needs and grievances of working women than the leadership in London.

In the first instance, this type of commitment was certainly true for the Leicester women, and much of the evidence within this study points to the fact that the Leicester WSPU was begun by working women fighting for women's issues within the local boot and shoe industry. But how far was this branch typical of other provincial groups around the country, and what does it tell us about the WSPU in general? By looking at similar towns within the East Midlands, notably Northampton, and Nottingham, and comparing the experiences of the local WSPU branches, answers to some of these questions can be found. However, before this can be achieved, an understanding of the backgrounds and traditions of these women is much needed and an explanation given as to why these three towns were chosen.

As to Leicester and Northampton, both towns had much in common and both were deemed radical in their political outlook. Further, they were large boot and shoe manufacturing areas employing many women either as outdoor machinists or as indoor factory workers. Therefore, if any pattern of female militancy emerges in one town, it follows that it has every chance of doing so in the other. But could this correlation be repeated elsewhere? In order to test this hypothesis, a third town was needed and Nottingham appeared to fit the bill.

However, although Nottingham had much in common with Leicester and local manufacturing processes included the employment of many women, by the end of the nineteenth century, it had failed to develop and maintain strong Labour support. ⁽³⁾ Indeed, in July 1907, Mr Thornloe, a self-proclaimed working man, confessed to Nottingham Trades' Council that the Labour movement had been reluctant to organise. He said,

In Nottingham, we have been rather slow, and although we have one member, (Mr Richardson) there is no reason why we should not have three. ⁽⁴⁾

It is not true to say, however, that there had never been politically active women in Nottingham, as the formation of the Nottingham Female Political Union in 1838 clearly demonstrates otherwise. These women had been part of the Chartist movement and like women in "Radical Leicester" ⁽⁵⁾ it is in this period that we can most easily trace the political activity of working women and to see their influence and involvement in the fight for something akin to universal suffrage.

Although information about these women is very scarce, it can be said with some certainty that working women were deeply involved in both towns. As Dorothy Thompson has pointed out in her book, *The Chartists*, ⁽⁶⁾ although the ratio of women to men appears low, this in itself is not always a measure of poor support; for in Leicester in 1848 the Chief Constable was under no illusion as to how many women were involved. In a report to the Home Office he reported that there were at least 2,000 women Chartists in his district, compared with 5,000 men, and that they possessed a considerable supply of arms. ⁽⁷⁾ But by 1900, militant women's organisations in Nottingham had completely disappeared along with any radical ideology they might have engendered. Consequently, it is only by comparing the disparate experiences these women underwent in the three towns that an understanding of their differences can be fully understood.

II

In Leicester, working women within the boot and shoe industry had been consistently introduced to radical working-class politics with the result that, by the 1890s many were deeply involved in the two most prominent working-class organisations within the town, notably the infant Labour Party and the comparatively successful Women's Co-operative Guild, who not only maintained a high percentage of members, but also had several different branches within the town. It was within these groups that women not only fought for a realistic minimum wage, but also campaigned to improve working conditions for thousands of Leicester women.

In lofty matters such as these, the Women's Co-operative Guild proved more than adept at promoting political issues of worthy note. Indeed, not only did the Socialist Tom Mann find a hearty welcome when he came to talk on Syndicalism, but when the *Equity* Women's Guild met for the first time on 19 February 1896, Mrs Dring of Lincoln read a paper entitled, "The Evils of Homework For Women".⁽⁸⁾ More importantly, as early as 1893, it had been decided amongst the Guild women to promote a national appeal to raise a motion in favour of women's suffrage. As a result of this motion, 2,200 signatures were collected nationally in support of "the political enfranchisement of women is a part of that social justice which we, with all other social reformers, are zealously striving for."⁽⁹⁾

It was primarily because of this involvement in Labour politics and industrial issues that the Women's Co-operative Guild, drawing on female employees within the boot and shoe industry, can be seen as the cradle of the Leicester suffragette movement in that its members were both working-class and socialists. As Bill Lancaster noted, the hosiery trade also saw women giving tacit support to socialist-inspired leadership within the Leicester Amalgamated Hosiery Union.⁽¹⁰⁾ Therefore, not for the first time were working women attempting to relate their industrial struggles to a change in their political status. Indeed, for many working women during the 1890s the vote and improved working conditions were intrinsically bound together and these women consistently argued that

one could not be achieved without the other. Consequently, unlike the Women's Co-operative Guild in Northampton, who tended to absent themselves from national issues, the Leicester women played a major role in the campaigns of the Guild promoting both social and industrial issues. For example, after Mrs Abbott of Tunbridge Wells broached the question of the new Poor Law in 1894, Leicester women like Mrs Lowe and Mrs Barnes, who both later joined the WSPU, successfully sought to be elected as Poor Law Guardians. As Gaffin and Thoms have pointed out in *Caring and Sharing*,

Given its interest in the problems of women and children, it was natural that much of the Guild's attention should centre upon the new Poor Law. ⁽¹¹⁾

The Leicester Women's Co-operative Guild was formed in Leicester in 1890, and almost from the start played an important role in ordinary women's lives. Not only did it give them a forum in which they could discuss the issues and problems that directly affected them, it also allowed them, as D H Lawrence so eloquently puts it in *Sons And Lovers*, to "look at their homes, at the conditions of their own lives, and find fault." ⁽¹²⁾ On this point, it is important to remember that the Women's Guild in the North of England provided one of the most important sources for women's suffrage before the formation of the WSPU in the larger textile areas like Bury, Burnley and Manchester, and in this respect Leicester proved to be no exception as many women were introduced to radical feminism alongside many famous non-militant suffragists like Mrs Ashworth and Mrs Bury, a mill worker from Darwen. These women often frequented meetings within the town and so intense were some of these debates that Mrs Bury, attending her first assembly in 1895, declared that,

It was a revelation..... At the close of the meeting I felt as I imagined a war-horse must feel when he hears the beat of drums. What I saw and heard at Leicester changed the whole of my life for the next few years. ⁽¹³⁾

As a result, this long-established radical feminism was to have two major repercussions

within the Labour movement. Firstly, it was to colour the activities of working women within the trade union movement as it brought into sharp relief the need for all trade unionists, whether male or female, to win the vote. And secondly, it was to demonstrate to working women the futility of expecting both help and support from their male colleagues. As one Leicester woman lamented in 1890,

There are many things in connection with the labour of women in factories which require the attention of trade unions. ⁽¹⁴⁾

Therefore, almost from the start, the fight for recognition of women's concerns appeared to be an uphill struggle. Indeed, many male trade unionists within the footwear industry not only brought pressure to bear on young women to conform to official union policy, but continually objected to married women working in the industry at all. A major debate raged through the pages of the *Leicester Mercury* in 1913 as men complained that women were taking jobs that men could do. They also suggested with some credibility, that it was unfair for some families to take home two wage packets in times of high unemployment. As a result of this dogmatic male intransigence, the relationship between the sexes in Leicester deteriorated further and reflected the hostility of 1911 when it broke out into open war. As Alan Fox has pointed out in *A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, 1874-1957*, ⁽¹⁵⁾

This uneasy relationship between the sexes needs to be seen against the background of the militant suffrage movement if its full significance is to be realised.....By 1910 what had begun as a modest and respectable movement by mainly middle-class women for certain limited suffrage rights, had developed into a women's rebellion against the inferiority of women's status and the limitations on their opportunities for self-fulfilment. ⁽¹⁶⁾

In some respects, Alan Fox misunderstood the background and intentions of the early suffrage campaigners in Leicester and although it is true to say that it began as a modest

and respectable movement, the WSPU in Leicester was begun primarily by working-class women for working-class motives and had come about as a direct consequence of a faltering campaign waged by constitutional suffragists both in Leicester and elsewhere. By the end of the nineteenth century, despite unrelenting pressure applied by such stalwarts as Millicent Fawcett and Lydia Becker, the suffrage crusade had made little headway in the twenty years between 1870 and 1890. In truth, the respectable facade that was “sensible, patient and undeviating sanguine” ⁽¹⁷⁾ had always been met by stoic intransigence on the part of Liberal ministers, who believed, as nineteenth-century politicians once thought of working men, that to enfranchise women would be a further “leap in the dark”.

Instead, as Sheila Rowbotham believed, they “found their sentiment in their womenfolk encased in their crinolines” ⁽¹⁸⁾ and thought that a woman’s place was not only in the home, but was also in a social position that was economically dependent upon a man. Consequently, the problems facing the constitutionalists in the 1880s went far deeper than just enfranchising women, it struck at the very heart of women’s position in society. To accord women equality was not only politically dangerous, it was also a shift in their legal and economic status. Thus, as Roger Fulford asked in *Votes For Women*,

What chance had the annual Women’s Suffrage Bill, with its threadbare arguments and antique air, of enlisting support and commanding attention? ⁽¹⁹⁾

The answer, quite simply, was none at all. To all intents and purposes, the campaign, in the face of determined male prejudice, had all but ground to a dignified halt .

However, the struggle for women’s rights in industry had produced a new breed of radical women that would take up the cudgels of the women’s movement as the new century dawned, and in Leicester, women like Miss Bertha Clark, Mrs Lowe, wife of a local Labour Councillor, and Mrs Alice Hawkins, had long been active members of the NUBSO and had vigorously campaigned to improve working conditions within the

industry. As an active socialist and an exponent of the co-operative ideal, Alice Hawkins had begun work in the 1880s at the age of thirteen as a machinist in the newly founded Co-operative factory, the *Equity* on Friar's Causeway. Instilled with the ideas and principles of Socialism she joined the infant ILP in 1892 where she and her husband, Alfred, energetically sought to make female suffrage a real issue. Indeed as early as 1895, under the auspices of the ILP's Women's Auxiliary, Alice Hawkins and others had often lamented the fact that under the present system of parliamentary representation, where one sex had no vote, women of all classes were, in reality, political nonentities.

This inequality inflamed their sense of political injustice and they vehemently argued that in order to give women an interest in social questions of the day, they not only needed a direct stake in the political system, but more importantly, they had to give them the power to deal directly with social and political problems as they arose. Clearly these women had an interest in the suffrage question long before the Pankhursts had brought it to the fore. But the question facing working-class women before 1904 was, by which route they would press their case? In Nottingham, the evidence of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies' membership book ⁽²⁰⁾ suggests that women within the silk and lace industries attached themselves to the Liberal, non-militant organisation, but their numbers were small and they did little to challenge the status quo. In Leicester, militant trade unionist women believed that their best chance lay with the up-and-coming infant ILP, yet to all intents and purposes, the ILP had always been ambivalent on the question of women's suffrage. On the other hand, members like Keir Hardie had always supported female suffrage as a matter of principle. However, to many influential policy-makers within the Labour movement, the question was beyond the objectives of trade unions and the ILP. They sought to strengthen male workers' wage claims in the belief that it was the man's duty to provide for the woman, a tradition that can be traced back to the 1880s. ⁽⁴⁵⁾

In 1902, confronted with indifference from her male colleagues, anger and frustration led one Leicester female commentator to note that the question of female suffrage was always cropping up like a poor relation that was waiting pathetically and patiently for wider recognition. ⁽²¹⁾ These militant women were now prepared to work on the issue of votes

for women outside the normal constraints of the ILP and the trade union movement and rejected the slow, but good work done by the Women's Co-operative Guild. Paradoxically, before the formation of the WSPU in Leicester, some women, including Alice Hawkins and Mrs Barnes helped form what was to become the Women's Labour League in April 1906. This organisation was formed in Leicester after Mrs Ramsay MacDonald, Mrs Banton, Mrs Cox and Mrs Edith Barnes returned home from a WLL meeting in London ⁽²²⁾ and organised the first meeting at the home of Mrs Gilbert, of 72 Sparkenhoe Street.



Mrs Margaret MacDonald.
Source, Leicestershire
Records Office.

Immediately the new Leicester branch received support from the Leicester MP, Mr Thomasson and the Liberal, Sir John Rolleston.

At no point was this to be a woman's wing of the Labour Party. Rather it was to be an independent woman's organisation that sought to advance and protect the industrial interests of all working women in much the same way that the Women's Co-operative Guild sought to protect and advance women's issues elsewhere. As Ramsay MacDonald later wrote,

Invitations are being sent out to all Labour Party members of Parliament and candidates asking them to pass them on to their wives and other women supporters, to secretaries of affiliated trade unions with women members, and to socialist societies, asking them to pass on the invitations to women members likely to be able to attend. ⁽²³⁾

Initially, the idea to form the organisation was Mrs Margaret MacDonald's, and it was one of her most cherished projects, ⁽²⁴⁾ though undoubtedly the development of this group had been prompted by the success of the WSPU's campaign in the North of England. According to both Sylvia Pankhurst and Keir Hardie, ⁽²⁵⁾ the ILP sought to stem the

influx of working women into the Pankhursts' organisation by a recruitment drive of its own and by July 1906 the local WLL was denouncing the tactics of the WSPU in London in favour of a more measured approach and appealed to working women to join the organisation with the message that,

Those women who think the main value of the vote is to readjust certain laws that tell hardly against their sex are profoundly mistaken. ⁽²⁶⁾

But in the end the formation of the WLL and its affiliation to the ILP was not enough to satisfy the radical demands of some of these women and Mrs Barnes and Alice Hawkins turned their back on the organisation and helped form the Leicester branch of the WSPU almost a year later.

As it may be deduced by the desertion of some of these women from the WLL, however well-intentioned these movements were, they lacked the fire and dynamism that the WSPU would later bring to the women of Leicester. Consequently, by 1904, local radical female trade unionists had come to realise that little had been done, or would be done without drastic measures being taken to secure them the vote. In Leicester, almost from the outset of their participation within local politics in the 1890s, it was clear that there would be little support within any political party for female suffrage. Of course, Ramsay MacDonald always maintained that he was in favour of the move, and in 1902 the Leicester ILP supported a petition in favour of giving votes to women on the same terms as men. ⁽²⁷⁾

But in reality, these acts of solidarity were little more than window dressing. Indeed, evidence from more local organisations like the Trades' Council suggests that opposition was as rigid as ever. In response to a petition from Leeds, sponsored by Mr Allen Gee, to support a female franchise, Mr Lowe, a member of the No 2 Branch of the NUBSO, summed up the feelings of the Council when he maintained that the time was not yet ripe for women to have the vote. The petition was marginally rejected by 110 votes to 103. ⁽²⁸⁾

As a result, within this climate of stagnation and frustration, the birth of militancy was surely inevitable. Radical women trade unionists' hopes and ambitions would not have allowed them to accept anything less. This frustration was further compounded when Mr Allen Gee's motion (that women be franchised on the same terms as men) was defeated in the Trade Union Congress. For many, this was a bitter blow. Instead, they contended that any measure, however limited, would be better than nothing and to object to the motion on the grounds that only propertied women would benefit was nonsense.

In the end, this impasse was broken in Manchester by what was, to all intents and purposes, a middle-class family committed to working-class machinations within the confines of the infant ILP. These tenacious women had both the personality and oratorical genius that would breathe life into a new movement, and although Christabel Pankhurst would later grow increasingly dissatisfied with the brackish stance of many ILP's views on women's suffrage, this unique household would have the power to win over the hearts and minds of many women who were still emotionally and intellectually bound to Socialism and the ILP.

This new organisation, The Women's Social and Political Union, was founded in Manchester in October 1903, ⁽²⁹⁾ and its policies would be in all respects identical with those of Labour. Consequently, it was suggested that the organisation be first called the Women's Labour Representation Committee. Unfortunately, Christabel Pankhurst was not present at this first meeting, and when later told of the proposed name, protested strongly that it was not possible. Her new-found friends, Miss Gore-Booth and Miss Roper, had planned another committee with just this name in mind. Shocked and hurt at her daughter's disapproval, Mrs Pankhurst caved in to Christabel's suggestion and renamed the group the Women's Social and Political Union, thus,

The next day a few women, mostly working-class ILP supporters, arrived at 62 Nelson Street and within half an hour the Women's Social And Political Union was in business. ⁽³⁰⁾

Consequently, the WSPU was to bring to the women of the East Midlands a promise of active agitation that had hitherto been lacking within the trade union movement in Leicester and, when a campaign against Government ministers began, they were wholeheartedly behind the move.

III

In Northampton, on the other hand, the town was, by tradition, Liberal radical rather than radical Chartist in its politics and saw relatively low levels of trade union activity before the First World War. One significant reason for this slow development within the workforce can be found in its unique pattern of industrial growth. Unlike Leicester and Nottingham, Northampton was largely a one-industry town centred around boot and shoe manufacture with small master and workshop employment. For example this trend was most graphically displayed in 1851 when the town's workforce was categorised as,

Table 2.1

43% Semi-skilled workers
26% Small masters, shopkeepers and clerks
11% Skilled craftsmen. ⁽³¹⁾

For the greater part of the nineteenth century, the shoe industry was largely unmechanised and it was not until the 1880s that boot and shoe manufacturers began to impose slow technological and organisational change on unwilling shoemakers. As Keith Brooker has shown in his article, *The Northampton Shoemakers' Reaction To Industrialisation: Some Thoughts*, ⁽³²⁾ the extent to which the shoemaker controlled his working environment greatly hampered any attempts by manufacturers to significantly improve efficiency and productivity. Moreover, this independence of small outdoor workers similarly resisted trade union activity when it appeared to interfere with their control at work. This was amply demonstrated in 1892 when the Union attempted to curb outwork abuses and sweating. Part of their proposal was to force employers to be responsible for providing workshop accommodation that would be free of 'standing rent' and charges for

gas. However, there was strong opposition from shoemakers who were critical of the Union for speeding up the process of change, as one Irthingborough worker commented,

The men do not thank the Union for doing so. They do not want their liberty meddled with, as they have shops to work inSome will leave the Union if they do not stop so much interference. ⁽³³⁾

Yet more importantly, many shoemakers readily shared the outlook of their Nonconformist employers and it was recognised by Union officials that a lot of work had to be done before outworkers would be convinced that any change would prove beneficial. Moreover, in such an environment no successful labour movement was possible before the turn of the century and even then it was small and ineffectual. As J Foster argued, in *Capitalism and Class Consciousness in 19th Century Oldham*, ⁽³⁴⁾ although Northampton's poverty was high, its class consciousness was not altogether fully developed and only began to emerge after the Third Reform Act in 1884.

Before that, as John Foster quite rightly suggested, ⁽³⁵⁾ despite the concerted efforts of a few forward-thinking trade unionists in the 1830s and 1840s, very few men and women came forward to join labour organisations. Instead, Northampton was to flourish on the cheapness of its labour, and its lack of militancy was a direct result of a constant influx of country labourers who continued to undermine negotiations for better pay and conditions. This was, arguably, the singlemost influence on the suppression of a coherent class-consciousness developing in Northampton at this time, and despite the sporadic attempts of the local Society of Shoemakers to keep the price of labour up, they were undercut by this constant stream of economic migrants who sought work at almost any price. In the light of their unsuccessful attempts to affect any aspect of their employment, it is hardly surprising that the Northampton shoemakers' union had a little over one hundred and sixty members, out of a possible three thousand people in 1845. In reality, there was little chance that a union so little patronised could impose any kind of trade discipline on the incessant stream of immigrant workers, and, as a result, local employers could run roughshod over their workforce and inflict punishment beatings and imprisonment for any

minor infringement of work-related offences. As John Foster again points out, there were only small “isolated pockets of labour resistance amid a labour force whose cultural and emotional ties were still tied to the land.” Indeed, in 1851, 72% of the population of Northampton were recent immigrants from the countryside. ⁽³⁶⁾

Of course, the pace and nature of any class formation and the development of an independent women’s movement depended upon the nature of the local economy, society and pattern of industrial development. In this sense, Northampton failed to develop a tradition of radical feminism, despite the appalling poverty and low wages in the 1840s, but it did develop a tradition of political activity, and the inclusion of women in local politics towards the end of the century. This growth was partly brought about by the activities of the constituency parties and tended to affect the upper and lower middle-classes. As Janet Howarth suggests in her article, “Politics And Society In Late Victorian Northampton”, ⁽³⁷⁾ “The local Press reported an enormous growth in the scale of party organisations and the number of political functions after the Third Reform Act.” ⁽³⁸⁾

Throughout the county, women of comfortable means sought a political outlet for their ambitions and as a result the Primrose League exploded into activity. Again as Janet Howarth points out, these were not just organisations that attended to the dull business of raising funds and listening to speeches, they worked extremely hard at making politics entertaining for the ordinary voter. Indeed, at one such event in the summer of 1894, the Primrose League’s event at Blisworth proved so popular that special cheap trains were laid on in the afternoon and evening.

Without doubt, throughout the 1880s the personality and influence of the local Liberal MP, Charles Bradlaugh, did much to generate this explosion of popular politics especially amongst the newly enfranchised working class in Northampton and principally within the West Ward district of the town. For example, in 1874, only 6,829 heads of households could vote, yet by 1880 this figure had risen by 43% to 9,765. Of these householders, according to Edward Royle, “a majority of working-class voters lived within the West Ward district and voted Liberal.” ⁽³⁹⁾

However, this strong Liberal support was not entirely confined to the working-class radical. Support for Charles Bradlaugh was also widespread amongst the prosperous small boot and shoe manufacturers where his personal brand of atheism, republicanism, divorce, birth control and, of course, votes for women found widespread appeal. ⁽⁴⁰⁾ Bradlaugh in turn toned down his more extreme views and championed Secularism as an important element in Radical Liberalism. Although Bradlaugh's ideology contained much that was radical it also contained within its philosophy a conservative element that was to retard militant feminism within the Northampton WSPU.

Just as the co-operative movement in Leicester was to be the genesis of the suffragette movement within that town, the early activities of the Radical Liberals, Secularists and Bradlaughites were the formative years for the Northampton WSPU, as many of these Liberal women, like Mrs Butterfield, Mrs F Ellen, of Queens Park Parade, and Mrs Gubbins, whose husband was a member of the Liberal Association, were Primrose Leaguers, ⁽⁴¹⁾ and staunch Liberal supporters.

Table 2. 2 Names, Addresses and Organisations of known WSPU members

<u>Name</u>	<u>Address (where known)</u>	<u>Organisation</u>
Mrs Butterfield		Primrose League
Mrs F Ellen	Queens Park Parade	Primrose League
Mrs Gubbins	20 St George's Place	Primrose League
Mrs Collier		Primrose League
Mrs Beatie		Women's Liberal Ass
Mrs Brooks		Women's Liberal Ass
Mrs A Tebbutt	9 St Matthews Parade	Women's Liberal Ass
Mrs Brown		Women's Liberal Ass
Mrs Buswell		Women's Liberal Ass ⁽⁴²⁾

This background had at least two major consequences for the manner in which the Northampton WSPU was to grow and develop. In the first place, this political

apprenticeship, within the remit of radical secularist ideology at that time, grounded the later Northampton suffragettes with the sense of respectability that even the Pankhursts found hard to break. For many nonconformist radicals, the influence of radical policies espoused by Bradlaugh had a deep and lasting effect, and though careful to ensure that his political position was not entirely based on secularist thinking, his reputation and political support was not only formed around the nucleus of Secularist support, but it also appealed directly to the wider radical sympathies of the town.⁽⁴³⁾ As a result, as David Nash has pointed out in *Secularism, Art and Freedom*,⁽⁴⁴⁾ for many secularists, the twin beliefs of respect for the individual and social betterment became intertwined in an ideology of respectability. This was then used as a yardstick by which to regulate individual behaviour and social policy, and as a model of status aspiration. Moreover, respectability could prove highly attractive to local small owner producers within Northampton who sought respect for their achievements, manners, self-betterment and self-education.⁽⁴⁵⁾

And secondly, it retarded any urgency to win the vote that these women might have felt. This was primarily for two reasons. On the one hand, these women were from relatively well-to-do backgrounds and the pressing need to improve working conditions was not of any real concern to them, and on the other hand, many were married and in their forties by the time the WSPU was established within the town. As a result, the passion and the urgency that some of the younger, middle-class suffragettes possessed was absent in these rather slow and meticulous women.

Yet, without doubt, all this activity did, to some degree, affect the working women of the town, and like the women of Leicester, workers within the boot and shoe trade formed an embryonic Women's Co-operative Guild in January 1893 after a rousing visit by Miss Llewelyn Davis, the movement's General Secretary.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Yet for all its great promise, and despite its working-class base, by comparison, the branch fared badly until the Great War and its membership was never high.⁽⁴⁷⁾ This may have been due to the lack of Labour and socialist politics within Northampton's male population and the reluctance of many women to step out of their traditional role as housewife or mother. As Ethel Klein has

noted in *Gender Politics*,⁽⁴⁸⁾ women only came to radical feminism through the experience of non-traditional roles, arising from work, divorce or reduced childbearing. But in Northampton and to some extent Nottingham, this thesis was not entirely the case, as many women clearly did not ascribe to radical socialist politics as a direct result of industrial experience. Nor could these women totally reject the traditional definition of their collective status, and as a result, the Northampton Women's Co-operative Guild branch confined itself to organising meetings and assisting the education committee, all traditional roles prescribed by male co-operators. Consequently, at no point did the Northampton Women's Co-operative Guild involve itself in many of the mainstream radical policies of other Guild women.

For example, throughout the 1890s the Women's Co-operative Guild, at a national level, actively sought to promote women's trade unionism and to fight for better conditions within the workplace. However, in Northampton, using the evidence of meetings reported in the local press as very few original minutes survive, there is little to substantiate the idea that any Guild women played an active part in these campaigns. Of course, trade conditions made employer resistance to trade union activity almost a certainty, but what little evidence remains suggests that these matters often went without consideration. In many ways, this marginalisation was, most certainly, male led, and entirely reflected the local condition. For instance, in Leicester, mainly because there was a measure of radical feminism within the trade union movement, there was a positive reaction to anti-feminism by the Left and much condemnation of male trade unionists who refused to involve themselves in women's issues. But this reaction was in part due to the vibrant trade union activity of both men and women within the town. Indeed, as Bill Lancaster has observed, trade unionism in Leicester was more salient than in other shoe-manufacturing centres. For example, the NUBSO in Northampton could only muster a total of 600 members in 1888, while in Leicester membership stood at well over 6,000. This represented one trade unionist to every 2.4 workers in the Leicester boot and shoe trade by 1891.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Consequently, it is possible to argue that employees in Leicester were far more radical than their Northampton counterparts, and therefore led by example. Moreover, and despite the fact that many women found it difficult to identify with a

masculine milieu of local trade unionism, ⁽⁵⁰⁾ in many ways the men still supplied radical role models that women could follow and aspire to.

IV

As it has been pointed out, in Nottingham there had once been a group of radical women who took an “active, public and often turbulent part in street demonstrations,” ⁽⁵¹⁾ and set up their own Chartist group, the Nottingham Female Political Union, in 1838. As early as 20 October 1830, the *Nottingham Review* reported that a meeting of females, pursuant to public notice, was held for the purpose of forming a political union of females to co-operate with the Birmingham Female Political Union. ⁽⁵²⁾ Consequently, even before the Reform Bill of 1867 when John Stuart Mill put female suffrage to the top of the political agenda, these working women were deeply concerned that all women should have the vote on the same terms as men, as this attack on a Nottingham shopkeeper made clear when, flexing their economic muscle, they declared,

No persons are well qualified to bring these very important personages to their senses than the women of England upon whose mind we would impress as a public duty the necessity of expending their money only with shopkeepers friendly to the cause, justice and universal suffrage. ⁽⁵³⁾

Although some male members of the Chartist movement thought the pursuit of female suffrage might retard the fight for universal male suffrage, many presented a strong case for women’s involvement in politics. As Dorothy Thompson pointed out, there were no serious questions of philosophy involved, only a broad principle that stated that the rights of women were as obvious as the rights of working men. Unfortunately, the right to vote was not to be extended to all women. It was thought that only unmarried and widowed women should vote. As John Watkins wrote in the *English Chartist Circular* in 1841,

So far as being excluded from taking part in politics, women ought to be allowed to vote, though not wives, for they and their husbands are one, or

ought to be as one, but only maids and widows. ⁽⁵⁴⁾

Curiously enough, this line of argument was later used by the Liberal Minister Birrell in a speech to the Nottingham Liberal Association in 1908. ⁽⁵⁵⁾

Without doubt, the NFPU was not a small group, or by any means, unimportant. This influence was clearly demonstrated in November 1838, when a huge parade of four thousand people marched through the streets of Nottingham. The NFPU, under the leadership of a local Nottingham woman, Margaret Ann Abbott, led the procession under their own banner. ⁽⁵⁶⁾ Further, and this is widely accepted by most historians, their prominence undoubtedly reflected their economic worth within the family network. Indeed, a report of the Frame Work Knitters Commission explained how essential the work of the wife and the child was to the man. In all cases they did the winding and stitching, saving their husbands the expense of having to pay somebody else to do it.

However, despite the early activities of the Nottingham Female Political Union, by the end of the 19th century, this radicalism had all but disappeared and the highly developed radicalism amongst some Leicester women was virtually unique within this area. In neither Nottingham nor Northampton were working women as organised or as committed to equal rights as in Leicester. In some respects, this is surprising given the many similarities between the towns. Undoubtedly, all three areas had a high percentage of female workers by 1914. For instance, in Leicester, according to an early social investigator with a keen interest in the conditions of the poor, the Reverend Donaldson maintained that in 1911 nearly 70% of the female population of Leicester were employed in various local industries, 25% of which were either married or widowed. ⁽⁵⁷⁾ The number entering the boot and shoe trade alone increased by 80% between 1901 and 1906. ⁽⁵⁸⁾

On the other hand, in Nottingham, according to Roy Church, around 75% of the factory workforce, by 1897, comprised female labour. ⁽⁵⁹⁾ One explanation for the difference between Leicester and Nottingham might be found in the way in which both towns

developed and influenced trade union activity. In Nottingham , there are broadly two major factors that explain the relative decline of trade union militancy and the absence of a viable working-class women's movement within the town. Firstly, the success of the Arbitration Board in the middle years of the nineteenth century did much to foster a positive relationship between employer and employee thereby reducing class conflict, and secondly, there was a real increase in wages and living conditions within the town that promoted social harmony between the classes which led in turn to an ideology of separate spheres.

Much of this success was directly related to the technical innovations that were being introduced throughout the hosiery and lace trades. While manufacturers were struggling to maintain markets against German and US competition, improved production through the use of rotary-frame knitting-machines greatly improved the bargaining strength of machine operators and hand frame workers. Caught between the fear of losing markets in a highly competitive market and wage increases, employers were often forced to concede wage increases. Indeed, according to Roy Church, in the 1860s male operatives in Nottingham could earn between 20/- and 35/- per week, while women could expect to earn between 12/- and 20/- ⁽⁶⁰⁾ In order to prevent further harmful disputes, it was decided that a Board of Arbitration and Conciliation be set up in order that decisions could be reached jointly and from the outset the question of wages, and the manner in which certain tasks should be performed, were successfully dealt with.

However, the continuous stream of technical innovation within the industry was, in the end, the Board's undoing. Irregular implementation of new machinery ensured that each area would be different and that there could be no united front or goal in wage negotiations. Instead, men working newer machines were forced to accept lower rates in order to offset increased productivity. ⁽⁶¹⁾

Moreover, technical developments simplified many operations which led to an increase in non-unionised women workers. This increase can be measured thus, (see table 2.3)

Table 2.3

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Female Workers</u>
1876	5,098
1879	15,630
1890	30,000. ⁽⁶²⁾

Undermined by sectional interests and the reluctance of employers to use the Board of Arbitration, the board ceased to be of use to many trade unions and each then sought to fight wage reductions by themselves. However, the final blow came when many manufacturers withdrew their machines to surrounding villages where unions remained weak and, because of the rise in mining villages, there was an ample supply of female labour. Consequently trade unionism had all but vanished by the turn of the century, and what little remained was of little value to women workers. Instead, with no strong union to support their ambitions and needs, they remained an unorganised force.

In the end, Nottingham during the Edwardian period was not a hotbed of labour radicalism. In fact, not only had socialist agitators made little headway in recruiting a dissatisfied work force, Nottingham also supported very few labour clubs. The reasons for this, according to Peter Wyncoll, can be traced to the fact that the old, staple industries had long provided a measure of secure employment and relatively high wages. ⁽⁶³⁾

On this point, Eric Hobsbawn, in *Labouring Men*, ⁽⁶⁴⁾ has argued that in the 1860, people within Nottingham's lace trade were earning three times the wages of dressers and menders. Not only that, local conditions and measures taken by forward-thinking councillors added to the material comfort of the working-class. For instance, much use had been made of the 1851 Lodging Houses Act to build decent housing for much of the town, and, as a result, by 1891 the census ⁽⁶⁵⁾ reported only 2 - 4 % of the total population lived in overcrowded conditions. The contention that working-class radicalism was somehow retarded by material comforts is also supported by events in Leicester during the 1880s and 1890s. Thus, in *Radicalism, Co-operation And Socialism*, ⁽⁶⁶⁾ Bill Lancaster made similar observations regarding working-class quiescence during this

period. As he argued,

Leicester experienced in these decades an unprecedented economic expansion. Work, if always prone to seasonal fluctuations, was freely available, but more importantly the type of work undertaken represented no great break with past practices. The shoe workers and stockingers..... enjoyed a lengthy period of relative prosperity. ⁽⁶⁷⁾

This material prosperity, as in Leicester, is therefore an important explanation of the absence of any large-scale socialist movement in Nottingham. Yet, increasing prosperity is not, however, the only factor in explaining the absence of any real class struggle or trade union activity. The development of class-consciousness had been moderated from the 1870s onwards by the inclusion of the working-class into a modified and reformed workplace that extended political, social and economic rights to those of a more Liberal outlook. Indeed, A. J. Mundella, a Nottingham hosiery manufacturer and Liberal politician, helped start the Nottingham Board of Arbitration for the hosiery trade, which consisted of equal numbers of employers and employees. This later came to serve over 60,000 workers with a measure of success. ⁽⁶⁸⁾

These factors had at least two major consequences. Not only do they go some way in explaining how many working men saw themselves, but, more importantly, they explain how they reacted towards their female colleagues. Arguably this was the same thing, and because the old, staple industries had long provided a measure of affluence, this had entrenched many working men with a philosophy of respectability and self-advancement, reminiscent of the old craft unions and a middle-class dogma that condemned, where economically possible, most women to the home and away from politics and industrial strife. Therefore, it was a complex mix of class ideology and gender antagonism that sought to isolate women from the workplace rather than the belief held by reductionists like Heidi Haiman, in her article "Capitalism, Patriarch and Job Segregation", ⁽⁶⁹⁾ that women were discriminated against because unwaged women provided for men in the home. Rather, women were debarred, or hindered within the workplace because they

weakened the ideological fight for a family wage and diluted the protectionist stance of the traditional craft skills. With low wages as an accepted norm and a reputation that they were easier to control than men because they complained less, women were undoubtedly used as a pawn between capital and labour. On the other side of the coin, working women had, when taking action within the industrial sphere, felt, to a large degree, anomie within the trade union movement, characterised by the absence of a cognate body of rules and widespread male support. This brought about a substantial amount of integration into the existing state of affairs with the result that many women accepted their inferior position within society at the expense of their own radical feminism. This lack of support was amply demonstrated when the men on the Trades' Council actively suppressed the organisations of working women if they became too radical or too demanding. Indeed, a letter from Christabel Pankhurst to Nottingham's Trades' Council in 1906, asking for permission to speak on women's suffrage was deliberately ignored and never put to the assembly for a vote. ⁽⁷⁰⁾

In Leicester, this lack of male support was clearly seen, on at least two different occasions in 1911, when women employees within the boot and shoe industry sought to join a breakaway union, formed by Alice Hawkins and Lizzie Willson. However, matters came to a head in November when the Anchor Co-operative works were accused by the female employees of taking coercive measures against female workers. ⁽⁷¹⁾ Both the Co-operative and the union not only fined two male trade unionists for speaking at a women's meeting, but also forced the women, on the pain of dismissal, back into the NUBSO against their will. Other than a cursory demonstration of their displeasure, many women complied with the request and abandoned their own union and co-operative guild and returned to trade unionism within the accepted parameters of male domination. ⁽⁷²⁾ However, that is not to say that some attempts were not made to organise women into trade unions, but often these attempts were weak-willed and, more often than not, resulted in women losing more than they gained. For example, during the 1890s the Lace Makers' Society expended both time and money in a vain effort to establish a female lace workers' organisation. But the union was completely controlled by male lace workers with the effect that as the Webbs noted at the time, "women members hardly ever spoke or voted against proposals made

by men.”⁽⁷³⁾ It is, of course, hard to assess fully how far the lack of experience retarded their political development, but in 1900 they clearly lacked the skills necessary to organise even the smallest of unions run entirely for women by women and by 1909, primarily due to a lack of interest of factory girls, the Nottingham branch had little choice but to break up.⁽⁷⁴⁾ From then on, they were forced to rely upon the discretion of their male colleagues to look after their interests. Indeed, in 1908, a Nottingham Trades’ Council report estimated that within a female workforce of around 25,000 women, less than 1,000 female workers belonged to any trade union.⁽⁷⁵⁾

Consequently, since the established Labour movement failed to organise effectively women workers, it is not surprising that female employees failed to become politicised and involved in issues of the day, and as a result, few working women came to see the need for the vote as a way of improving their low wages and harsh working conditions. These women undoubtedly lacked confidence in the future because they lacked confidence in themselves. There had been nothing in their lives that had enabled them to acquire such self-reliance. Their psychological bonds bound them to what Eric Fromm once called their “fear of freedom”.⁽⁷⁶⁾ In this sense, not every appalling condition automatically gives birth to radicalism and revolution. The need to eat and live subjects the individual to tighter constraints and all but compels the workforce as a whole to work under particular conditions that are already predetermined by the system into which they are born. Consequently, both factors, the need to live and the existing social system, in principle, are perceived as unalterable by the individual. Of course, this does not mean that some cannot try and effect social and political change, but the need for self-preservation forces the majority of workers, and especially female workers, to accept the conditions under which they have to live.

As Fromm maintained, the need to conform and accept the existing social and political status quo is far stronger than the need to better conditions through rebellion or revolution. “He may suffer,” he wrote, “from hunger and suppression, but he does not suffer from the worst of all pains, complete aloneness and doubt.”⁽⁷⁷⁾ In many ways this theory is somewhat dated at the end of the twentieth century despite the fact that anomie

has been breeding in Western industrial societies since the Second World War, but Fromm's pattern better fits the economic and social conditions at the beginning of the twentieth century rather than now, and was certainly true for the women workers in Nottingham and Northampton. But in Leicester the psychological effects of harsh working conditions within the shoe factories channelled their anger and frustration into other areas, but more importantly they were, in the main, not alone or considered anti-social.

In Nottingham, however, many women within the lace industry not only refused emancipation because choosing against habitual patterns was painful, but because they irrationally feared the offered alternatives, they believed, with some justification, that they had been able to live through all their problems so far and would continue to do so. Whereas the integration of women workers into the trade union movement allowed the Leicester women to develop a sense of class-consciousness, in Nottingham, the experiences of local women demonstrated the fact that involvement in industry was not enough on its own, as very few women became radicalised or militant during this period. Of course in 1911, some women, taken by the mood of industrial action, struck for better wages and improved working conditions, but their efforts never really amounted to much and few strikes were supported by male trade unionists. This was crucial, as support by the trade union movement was vital for success. As a result, the majority of working women remained ignorant of how their lives were affected by the work-roles of a capitalist society. They were only interested in social problems insofar as these problems entered into everyday life. Without support, education and a concerted intervention by their male colleagues, they were doomed to remain ignorant of their inferior social position.

While it is true to say that most men within the confines of organised labour in Nottingham hampered at every possible opportunity the efforts of women to organise themselves, they were also equally reluctant to intervene between women employees and the employers. As a consequence, many employers ruthlessly exploited the low status of women and frequently threatened wage reductions, unemployment and short-time

working with impunity. A good example of this repression was highlighted in an article in the *Commonweal*, in May 1890, when it wrote,

All sorts of tyrannies are imposed to break the spirit of the women workers and render them docile and serfs. The forewomen are selected especially for their ability to 'nag' and 'drive' the hands. One factory manager occasionally strolls down the room and if one of the women should turn her head to glance at the majestic passer-by, she is instantly dismissed. ⁽⁷⁸⁾

Consequently, it was against this background of relative indifference that women within the trade union movement were often marginalised. But by the turn of the century other factors were coming into play that ostracised the women further. New machinery, new types of work and a sharp decline within the lace and hosiery industry heralded in a new era of depression and poverty that consequently threw men and women into direct competition for work. Predictably, the men took a hostile stance and attempted to remove the women from the workplace altogether.

As Peter Wyncoll argued, this male defensive stance, "in the face of unemployment and falling wages was typical of those employed in the hosiery and lace trade." ⁽⁷⁹⁾ and did much to antagonise some sections of the female workforce. As one disgruntled woman worker from Nottingham complained in 1907, many men within the trade union movement were openly hostile to women within the Labour movement, and she at least, recognised that only by achieving the vote could women get a foot in the door. She wrote,

When women have won the Parliamentary vote, the door will be open.
We shall no longer have to ask the men what we may do,but will
make our own way. ⁽⁸⁰⁾

In the end, the road to the formation of the Nottingham branch of the WSPU was completely different and in some ways mirrored the national movement in London, in that it focused its membership around a small clique of middle-class women. Thus, while the Leicester WSPU was spurred into action by the experiences of working women within the boot and shoe trade, the Nottingham WSPU appears to have sprung from a wider revolt of middle-class women who had been attracted to the movement by the controversy surrounding Christabel Pankhurst's invitation to speak at Nottingham's University College in December 1907 and precluded, to a large extent, the involvement of working-class women. One such woman, Helen Kirkpatrick Watts, was, in the early years of the Nottingham branch, one of the prime movers who was not only the first to be arrested, but was also the local organiser. Born in 1881 into a world of propriety and relative comfort, she was the eldest daughter of a Church of England vicar in the Holy Trinity Church, Bordesley, Birmingham. In 1883, Alan Hunter Watts moved his family north and took up residency in Lenton, Nottingham. ⁽⁸¹⁾ In many ways, Helen Watts was entirely reflective of her class and upbringing, and as a consequence was politically a new Liberal who would, like many other middle-class suffragettes, have been more at home in the Conservative Party. Thus, by the end of 1907, she was neither emotionally nor psychologically a radical revolutionary like Alice Hawkins in Leicester, but more of a young woman who tended to indulge in Victorian pieties which undoubtedly emanated from a desire to do good. In the end, her conversion to militancy over the next two years was, in itself, a process of slow contemplation, a coming face-to-face with issues advocated by working women within the WSPU. As she later told a WSPU gathering in Morley's Cafe in Nottingham,

Had anyone told me that the next time that 'terrible woman' (Mrs Pethick-Lawrence) went to prison, I would accompany her, it would have seemed to me utterly impossible, an absurd idea. ⁽⁸²⁾

This intellectual growth, if it might be called that, is an important point for it firmly

establishes the basis for understanding why respectable young women answered the call of the Pankhursts and attacked the bastions of male domination with militant tactics as their methods. At no point did Helen Watts ever proclaim the vote for herself. Instead, she consistently argued with some passion that those less fortunate than herself needed the vote to address the glaring inequality between male and female workers. In this respect, she appeared to have been following the political philosophy of Leonard Hobhouse, with its obligation of social responsibility, bound by a simple principle that “responsibility should be commensurate with power.”⁽⁸³⁾ Indeed, on



Helen Watts of Nottingham.
Source, Nottingham Library.

many occasions she was allured to the belief that society can best ascend through the mutual assistance of all its members. It was for Helen Watts, to all intents and purposes, an organic society where a collective consciousness was to be focused on a responsibility to help one another in order to achieve prosperity through a relative equality. But more importantly, to do nothing rendered the whole of society at risk; as she said,

Those of you that have lived amongst, and studied the conditions of working women, know how their constitutional force is worn out faster than it can be replaced by the wages they receive, and youth rapidly gives place to a low vitality, weariness, illness and death itself....We are all members of one human body and weakness in one part runs into all others.⁽⁸⁴⁾

Despite its Hobbsian * gloss, Helen Watts clearly believed that social progress was equated with the growth of civic virtue and a concerted effort by those in positions of

* Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan*.

power and responsibility to improve the equality of life throughout society. She argued that a concept of liberty was needed to enfranchise women in order that, through the legislature, they might improve their own conditions. Echoing Hobhouse, if economic remunerations are not secured without the deliberate action of the State, they must be secured by means of deliberate action by the state. ⁽⁸⁵⁾

In essence, Helen Watts was of that utilitarian Liberal persuasion who believed that poverty and unemployment were not moral failings of the poor. Instead, the conditions and circumstances that they found themselves in resulted from the imperfections of a government which refused to intervene in all but the worst scenario of social and economic life. As a result, in order to readdress the problems of poverty and unemployment, the poor, the sick and women must claim a stake within the political system in order to promote and defend their own interests and economic position.

In complete contrast to Helen Watts, Mrs Elsa Oswald had also been attracted to the movement, but she was altogether more curious and not, at first, a natural recruit to the WSPU. Her husband, Mr J R Oswald, was a Conservative supporter and allowed his wife to fulfil her political desires in the Primrose League. As Liddington and Norris point out in *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, ⁽⁸⁶⁾ both Liberal and Tory women were kept firmly in their “ghetto organisations” with the reins of power firmly in the hands of the men. Although the movement certainly encouraged, up to a point, political activity, it was also a close restraining organisation that did little, in real terms, to address the very real concerns of middle-class women. Thus, when the WSPU began its campaign around the Nottingham area, many middle-class women were active enough in politics not to want to join. Yet, like the Women’s Liberal Federation, these women had not been schooled in the radical politics so familiar to the working women of Leicester, and to some extent, this must have retarded their political development for some time.

In reality, Elsa Oswald had no real concept of the problems and needs of the working-class. Ideologically she believed in self-help, and unlike Helen Watts, was not prepared to support the notion that the State take responsibility for the problems of old age, sickness

and unemployment. Instead the female franchise was to help address these problems. Women could then take responsibility for their lives, which, curiously enough, was a complete antithesis of how she herself lived. Undoubtedly, and despite the fact that the Nottingham branch found it hard to shake off male interference, women like Mrs Oswald found the WSPU in many ways liberating. But due to the constraints of marriage and an inability to break entirely with the Primrose League, Mrs Oswald found the descent into militancy in 1912 too hard to endure. She had no stomach for the coming fight and absented herself from the organisation. ⁽⁸⁷⁾

Although it is true to say that Helen Watts's philosophy derived from a socialist element in Liberalism, it was in fact a plea for liberal principles to radically reform and consolidate all aspects of society into a more collective stage of human development. However, her attitudes towards the more general subjection of women were entirely based on the classic arguments of John Stuart Mill's Liberal feminism. Both appeared to have accepted that there were "natural" roles, determined by biological and cultural factors, for men and women. As Mill wrote in *The Subjection of Women*,

When the support of the family depends, not upon property, but on earnings, the common arrangement by which the man earns the income and the wife superintends the domestic expenditure seems to me, in general, the most suitable division of labour between the two. ⁽⁸⁸⁾

In a sense, there is a paradox here in that the difficulty for many young, middle-class women at this time was that the real sexual revolution had yet to be fully defined, and many women still clung to an established sociological interpretation of what women should be. At no point did the early feminists offer a radical alternative to the family or to the relationship of men and women within it. Therefore it is of little surprise that many accepted certain social standards of femininity as biologically ordained and that chosen standards of femininity are natural. As F. P. Cobbe pointed out in *The Duties of Women* in 1881, ⁽⁸⁹⁾ the natural role of the woman was in the home and that the woman had a natural purity and vocation for motherhood and childcare. It was because these womanly

virtues were lacking in government that she demanded greater political rights, including votes for women.

By 1909, the suffragettes had further developed this argument to encompass the inferior social position of women to the perception that a moral regeneration of the British people could not begin until household slavery had been abolished through the implementation of equal rights between the sexes. As Helen Watts pointed out, it was a

woman's duty to look after the children. Her special function is to mother the race, and the sick, the young, the needy, the aged and all in special need of sympathy and care. ⁽⁹⁰⁾

Of course, these arguments, with their emphasis on women's natural role within the home contradicted quite sharply with the belief held by Alice Hawkins in Leicester, but the ideological process between the classes was neither simple nor a uniform process. As Les Gardiner believed,

It affected women in different ways. Working-class women had become radicalised by the burden of new domestic ideology and by work outside the home. Bourgeois women on the other hand had both time and leisure and material comfort to take a more romantic vision of what women should be in relationship to motherhood and marriage. ⁽⁹¹⁾

While both Leicester and Nottingham could boast a branch of the WSPU by the end of 1907, in Northamptonshire, despite many attempts by Alice Hawkins and the national leadership, the WSPU consistently failed to open a branch in the area before 1911 and this somewhat interferes with the comparative model. Yet the town is still worth looking at, albeit later, as it still has something to say, and the very fact that it was late in starting entirely reflects the unique conditions in that town. Moreover, when it did begin, the branch was predominantly centred upon the upper and lower middle classes. Why this should be is hard to say, but what is certain is that several attempts to organise the women

in the boot and shoe industry in Kettering and Thrapston consistently failed.

Yet that is not to say that all working women rejected the need to fight for the vote in the Northamptonshire area. Instead, they simply chose not to do it under the auspices of the Women's Social and Political Union, and the fight, what little there was of it, was centred on the WCG which, by and large, followed the national policy. Yet while the debate raged on in Leicester amid the women workers in the co-operative shoe factories, the Northampton Guild's position on women's suffrage was uncertain and ill-defined, despite the fact that Congress had passed several resolutions between 1904 and 1912 outlining their changing policies. But the debate in Northampton was not one of should they support full adult suffrage or a limited female franchise on the same terms as men. Instead, it revolved around the question of whether women needed the vote or not. This confusion was further compounded in 1905 when the committee agreed to support the principle of a limited franchise and by 1907, compromised along the lines of the WSPU, with a limited franchise on the same terms as men.

Despite the scarcity of evidence amongst the WCG minutes, it is still possible to say that this perplexity was almost certainly felt in Northampton and remained through to 1910 as the local branch consistently failed to decide one way or another. An interesting insight into this debate can be gleaned from the few surviving minutes of a branch meeting in March 1910, when Mrs Nelson, a former president of the WCG in Northampton and the first woman to sit on the Committee of Management, spoke supporting adult suffrage, and, indeed, put forward the suggestion that the guild, as a body, should join the People's Suffrage Federation and promote a parliamentary suffrage campaign to include all men and women. However, a local guild member, Mrs Dunkley, balked at the suggestion and offered the view that they were not yet ready for adult suffrage. For her part, she went on to say that she was not all that anxious for the vote.⁽⁹²⁾ Unfortunately, at this time, little can be said as to what class these women belonged, except to surmise that they were part of the working-class. But this crude label tells us little of their financial circumstances and ultimately, their ambitions and their needs. Indeed, it is the contention of this study that financial exploitation within the factory system added to the radicalism

of women and, in the end, their motivation to join the WSPU.

Consequently, by the time the Pankhursts had brought the issue of Votes for Women to the fore of English politics, many women around the country were more than receptive to her message as much had happened in their lives. In line with Marxist thinking, the process of industrialisation had left its mark and had transformed the majority of women's lives beyond recognition. For some, their sphere of influence was within the home and their work was relegated to that of housework, a position that was widely regarded as having little or no real value. On the other hand, the reality of work for many women was long, low-paid hours in the factories and sweat-shops around the country. Their experiences, however, within the workplace and their subjective position within the home were also their teachers, and by 1907, in Leicester and Lancashire at least, the evidence of both Liddington and Norris suggests that many women were at the fore of local politics and trade unions. Though while not normally in a position to dominate and to set local agendas, they were often able to influence and promote issues that concerned themselves.

Thus, by the end of 1907, the formation of the WSPU in Leicester and Nottingham was, for those involved, an opportunity to have a real voice in the world, and because of differing local conditions, and the fact that each person's political activities are channelled by the way in which they conceptualise and anticipate their needs, their priorities and consequently their strategies were bound to be different from those in London. At first, many women, and especially those in Leicester, attempted to explore and correct the problems as they saw them in their own lives. As a result, the WSPU within the provinces was often seen as a vehicle to promote social and economic change within their immediate environment. This is an important point, and often this view was at odds with the Pankhursts' conception of what the WSPU should be. Indeed, the wider picture visualised by the Pankhursts in London had little reality within the East Midlands and, quite often, their strategies and political ambitions meant very little to women on the shop floor and within the home. In contrast, the local women often wanted the WSPU to offer change at a local level and to work hand-in-hand with other political organisations. But all this was not to happen. From 1908 onwards, independence and democracy within the

WSPU were to be sacrificed on the Pankhursts' altar of autocratic control and will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter. Instead, local issues, whatever they were, were not allowed to cloud the issue of Votes for Women, and all members, regardless of their past and political experience, were to conform without question.

CHAPTER TWO

Radical Traditions And Psychological Influences Within The East Midlands Before 1907

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Chapter Three

THE BIRTH OF AN ORGANISATION. THE POLITICAL MOTIVES AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE MEMBERSHIP IN NOTTINGHAM AND LEICESTER.

Much of the evidence found in local newspapers, letters and an assortment of different documents within the various libraries does not always allow for an accurate and reliable comparison between the different WSPU branches within the East Midlands simply because the newspapers were concerned with other matters and really not designed to give a sociological analysis of their organisations. Nonetheless, what is accessible at least allows some measure of estimation and enables us to point to a number of general characteristics which can shed light on many of the participating women's social and political backgrounds. For example, the number of socialists was relatively low, and were to be found predominantly within the Leicester WSPU. Since the Liberal middle-class were trying to gain power within the Union at large, this group becomes of historical importance. Sadly, a comparison between income and political orientation was rather more difficult, given the uneven pattern of evidence, but some conclusions can be made. Indeed, this is of paramount importance for it allows the historian to gain a deeper understanding as to the motives and ambitions of many of these women who took part in the struggle for female emancipation. This in turn allows us to understand and reconstruct their individual policies and strategies within the different branches as they strove to gain equality in their own, unique manner. Further, the strength and reliability of the membership's beliefs based on their class backgrounds are also determining factors as to the fate of the different branches.

For, without doubt, many held convictions that were passionate and strong. Many of

these women genuinely wanted freedom and equality for all women and deeply sympathised with the poor and oppressed. Consequently we must ask, what were the different policies between the branches and how did their strategies vary between the towns? Without doubt and given their ILP and trade union background, the Leicester WSPU clearly believed their role as suffragettes was to promote equality wherever they found it, and this often meant dealing with working women and their grievances. Consequently, throughout its existence, it sought to champion industrial questions and supported female strikes with as much vigour as they could muster. On the other hand, in Nottingham, the women were from a somewhat different background and never really sought to emulate their sisters in the next town. Instead, they were completely satisfied in following the Pankhurst line and really only involved themselves with the wider issue of votes for women. Of course, some did see their involvement in the WSPU as benefiting all women, but change would only come through obtaining the vote. They were little interested in involving themselves in strikes, campaigns to elect Poor Law Guardians and women probation officers.

For the most part, the Pankhursts in London appeared more than happy to allow the branches to pursue whatever local agenda they might choose, provided that it bowed to Pankhurst authority and did not question the dictates of WSPU strategy. At no point could they call into question the methods of the leadership in seeking votes for women. As Sylvia Pankhurst later recalled,⁽¹⁾ all branches were built along democratic lines, even if the organisation itself was undemocratic. They could elect their own officers and committees and were wholly independent of HQ, paying no fixed fees or dues (although fundraising was more than expected) and were only bound to Clement's Inn by sympathy to its policy of achieving votes for women. *

Yet by 1907, the autonomy enjoyed by the local branches was to be a source of division and dissent within the organisation and culminated in Mrs Billington-Greig and Mrs

* This freedom of the branches is also seen in Glasgow, where the branch, in 1906, attempted to interview the President of the local Board of Trade on behalf of the unemployed and joined with a Labour Party resolution that unemployment should take precedence over all other questions during the coming session of Parliament, including votes for women. E. Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffrage Movement, London, Virago Press, 1977, p. 244.

Despard leaving to form their own organisation, The Women's Freedom League. Sadly, the root causes are now unclear, but the crisis came to a head during the summer of 1907, when Mrs Billington-Greig, encouraged by a spirit of independence that was sweeping WSPU organisation in the north,* sought to strengthen the local branches' independence by bringing them under the control of a regional council, the details of which have since been lost. However, the move to sever local branches from the Pankhursts in London was seen as a direct challenge to their authority and was prevented by removing all members who could not be relied upon to follow Christabel Pankhurst's orders without question. ⁽²⁾

Consequently, given the expectations of individual members, it is just as important to understand their different motives for joining the Pankhurst organisation, when in each town, other non-militant organisations were as common and, perhaps more acceptable to other mainstream political organisations. Finally, it is also important to ask what was the response of other political organisations within the East Midlands to the formation of the WSPU, and how did they deal with the shift to a militant stance on women's suffrage? After all, the WSPU was to signal a break with the old conventional non-militant protest and eventually turn its back on male support and help altogether.

After 1906, due in part to the dynamic intervention of the WSPU in London and their subsequent publicity, there was a rapid and spontaneous growth of WSPU branches around the country. As Rosen ⁽³⁾ has pointed out, this was a period of unprecedented expansion and by February 1907 not only did the Union employ nine paid organisers, but £2,959 had been collected during its first fiscal year. This growth rate was set to continue and during the financial year 1908 - 9 its income was three times that of 1907 - 8. ⁽⁴⁾ Nearly £3,500 had been spent on the hiring of halls alone, and the number of paid organisers had more than doubled to nearly thirty full-time officials. ⁽⁵⁾ Building on their initial success within the capital, paid organisers moved into the shire counties with the express purpose of mobilising as many women as possible. As a result, in most industrial

* In Scotland, the local branches had formed a semi - autonomous Scottish Council with a treasury of its own while others complained that it was unreasonable that they not be allowed to support the Labour Party. *Women's Franchise*, Fawcett Library, London Guildhall University.

centres around the Midlands, many diverse groups of women, for different reasons, came together and formed, what was to be, the rank and file of provincial members. In some towns, notably Leicester, this new organisation gave working-class women a radical outlet for their anger and frustration as well as an instrument by which they could try to make substantial economic, social and political gains. Indeed, the participation of working women within this branch appeared to be unusually high. This is a pivotal point as both the Nottingham and Northampton branches took on the more usual form of middle-class suffragettes dipping a tentative toe into the murky waters of radical feminism. This difference is all the more strange in that both Leicester and Northampton had similar patterns of development and contained large numbers of women who worked within the boot and shoe industry. Thus it might have been fair to assume that conditions and work practices were very much the same, as indeed they were. But, if Leicester could be looked upon as having radical and forward-thinking women, then Northampton, for reasons outlined in chapter two, could not. For while the Leicester women were able to become radicalised in the co-op movement and through trade union activity, this radicalisation was not transmitted to the women of Northamptonshire in the same way. There, trade union activity was a purely male preserve and the local co-operative movement, because it was heavily controlled by the male co-operators, lacked the dynamism of their Leicester cousins. Instead, the WSPU, when it began its recruiting drive in Northampton during 1908 and 1909, succeeded in only recruiting middle-class women. ⁽⁶⁾

This miscellaneous social mixture, of course, led to diversity, and as a result, the programmes for the various branches were never going to be identical. Each mirrored the specific way in which they were formed and developed, and reflected the ideological and political level of a given member's commitment. In turn, each branch passed through several stages of development before they were to come together under a uniform image of what Christabel Pankhurst deemed a suffragette should be, and the characteristics of these progressions entirely reflected local conditions and the considerable levels of criticisms proportioned by the different political parties. Under the pressure of circumstances, each branch matured and blossomed in the light of its surroundings. In Leicester, for instance, the ILP and Ramsay MacDonald were, at first, deemed natural

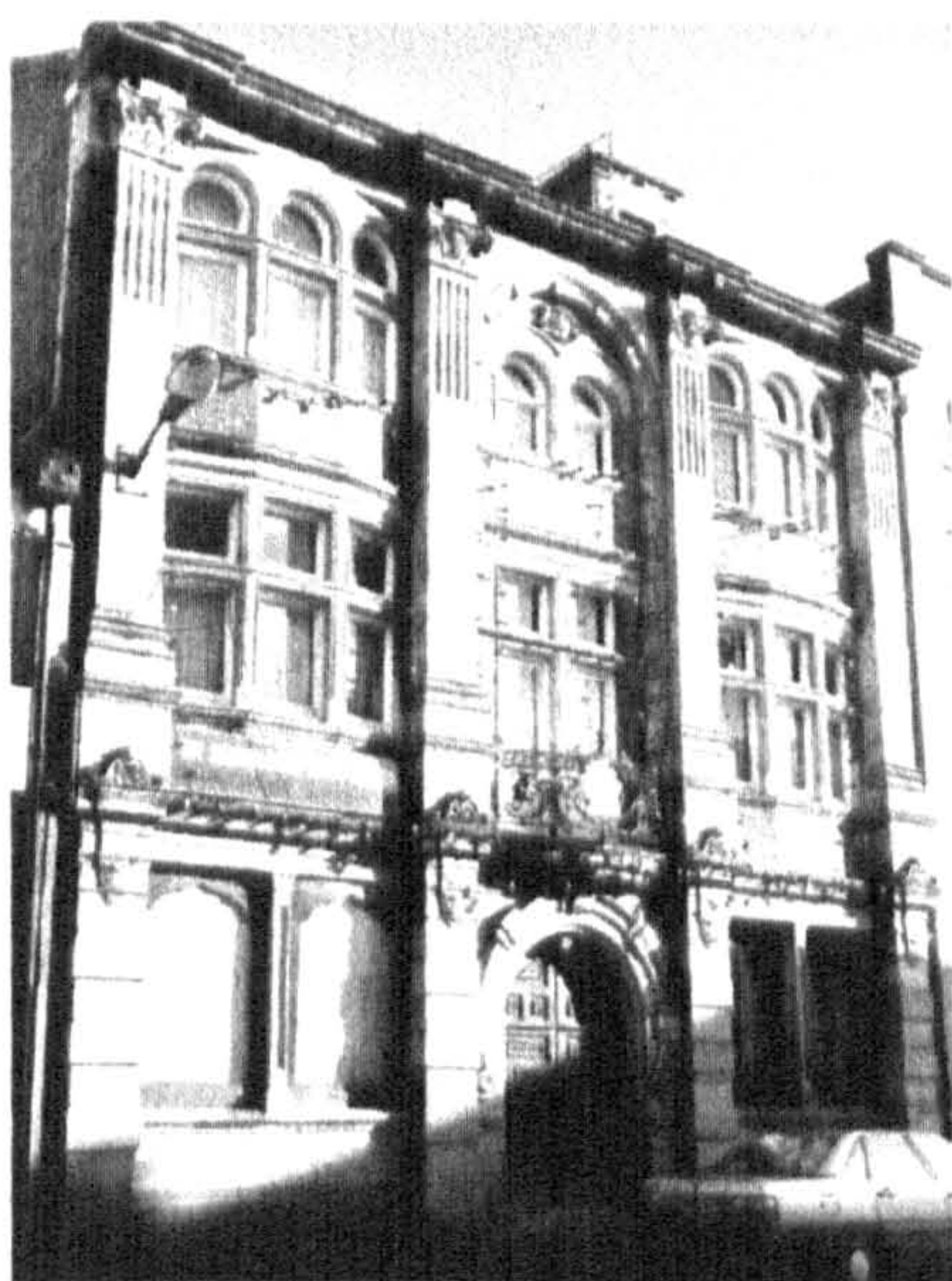
allies, yet both had quite different views regarding the direction, and indeed, the level of participation of women in politics. For Ramsay MacDonald, it was not just the introduction of militant tactics that he objected to, although he vehemently opposed such measures. Instead there is a feeling that he objected to women raising such matters when there were more pressing issues of labour to address. In much the same way, the Nottingham women also had problems in convincing the men and the Liberal Party that they had something worthwhile to say. They could not have been more topical on account of Christabel Pankhurst's stance on Liberal members of parliament and her attempts to draw a line between the WSPU and Asquith's government. This stance not only created friction between men and women, it also made WSPU meetings around Nottingham a dangerous experience. Yet despite the many hazards, both branches came into existence within nine months of each other with Leicester coming first. In Northampton, the branch was not formed until the end of 1911, and was completely at odds with the other two. At no time were Northampton women convinced by Christabel Pankhurst that acts of militancy were justified. Instead they repeatedly refused to carry out acts that would either damage property or alienate mainstream political support.

Arguably, their outlook and approach to the suffrage campaign either pointed to a high degree of self-responsibility that arose from a Liberal Nonconformity that dominated the town's politics, or it demonstrated a high level of dependency upon men and their political organisations. Either could have been true, as it is clear from newspaper reports many men, especially husbands of members, attended meetings in more than just an observer's role. Nevertheless, their feelings and actions were characteristic of an independency born out of wealth and privilege and they entirely reflected the norms and values of their Liberal circle. Indeed, many of the WSPU meetings around Northampton lacked the passion and militancy of either Leicester or Nottingham.

Arguably, any one member's feelings and approach to militancy depending on whether it was held by a affluent member of society or by somebody who had to seek their own wage within the industrial sphere. In Northampton, their perspectives were coloured by their material comforts. They lacked the response to unnecessary frustration and social

rejection and neither felt the aggression that is frequently aroused but rarely expressed due to social restraints in the factories within the towns. Indeed, for many hundreds of young women, work was a necessary evil to be suffered until they got married, and even then, many were forced to continue their work within the homes as outworkers. For only a small proportion of mainly middle-class women did work have an integral position in their life style.

II



The Boot and Shoe Trade Hall in Leicester. Source, Zoe Oughton.

The decision to form the Leicester branch appears to have been taken by Alice Hawkins some time in early 1907 after Mrs Billington-Greig, Mrs Cobden-Saunders,* and Miss Annie Kenny, arrived at the Shoe Trade Hall in St James Street to talk about their recent experiences in prison. Each had suffered arrest and imprisonment for protesting outside Parliament in 1906 and as part of WSPU policy toured Trades' Councils relating their story. It was in this manner that the WSPU once again came to Leicester, but this time what six Leicester working-class women, Alice Hawkins,

Miss Wells, Miss Knight, Mrs Catlin, Mrs Lowe and Mrs Edith Barnes,** saw and heard at this meeting prompted them to travel to London in February to attend a Women's Parliament organised by the WSPU in Caxton Hall the day before the State Opening of Parliament. *** This was the first time that the Leicester women took part in WSPU demonstrations within the capital. However, their introduction to this new form of

* She was the daughter of the Liberal radical Richard Cobden.

** Mrs Edith Barnes was at this time Honorary Secretary to the Women's Labour League.

*** They travelled down on the Tuesday and stayed with Mrs Quilter and Mr Neal, who was then the editor of *The Sentinel*. *The Pioneer*, 16 February 1907.

radicalism proved a costly affair in terms of lost wages and lost jobs. ⁽⁷⁾ Ironically the constitutionists in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Society had attended a meeting only a few days before when Edith Gittins and Mrs Ramsay MacDonald and her daughter attended a non-militant meeting in Exeter Hall. Margaret MacDonald later said of her daughter attending the NUWSS meeting, "I hope she will thank me when she grows up for being so considerate. I hope she will be proud of it." ⁽⁸⁾ Although this was basically a non-militant meeting it demonstrates the early co-operation between the different groups as the WSPU were courteously invited. As Sylvia Pankhurst later recalled,

A crowd of the non-militants assembled close to the Achilles Statue at Hyde Park Corner. It was a dismal wet Saturday afternoon, but in spite of the rain and the muddy streets a procession of women half a mile in length was formed and marched steadily on to attend the meeting in Exeter Hall in the Strand and Trafalgar Square. The procession was afterwards known as the 'Mud March'.⁽⁹⁾

By now, most women attending these meetings fully understood that should there be no mention of female suffrage in the King's Speech there would be a full assault on Parliament with the risk of arrest and imprisonment,* and by the afternoon of Wednesday 13 February 1907 it had become clear to those waiting in Caxton Hall that no mention of female suffrage had been made.

Incensed by what she deemed as the Government's lack of commitment to this issue, Mrs Pankhurst rallied those present to march on Parliament and demand an audience with the Prime Minister. Over three hundred women, led by Mrs Despard, marched the short distance to the House of Commons where they were met by a cordon of policemen along the perimeters of Abbey Green. Undaunted by odds, the women engaged the police in a

* Antiona Raeburn suggested, the use of the mass deputations were a departure from what had become convention. It had been the way of the non-militants to make an appointment for a select few to visit any members they wished to see. They would arrive in a cab at the House of Commons with all due ceremony. But now, the women of the WSPU would arrive en masse and on foot to be met by rows of policemen with instructions to admit just one.

struggle that was to drag on into the early evening. At one point, Alice Hawkins later recalled, mounted police appeared and “taking the place of Cossacks” ⁽¹⁰⁾ rode the women down. Later, Alice Hawkins wrote to Ramsay MacDonald from Holloway Prison and asked him to object in the strongest terms to the Home Secretary, for “ordering mounted police out to ride down women... no other civilised country would treat women in such a manner.” ⁽¹¹⁾ Along with Alice Hawkins, over fifty women were arrested, including two other Leicester women, Miss Knight and Miss Wells. *The Pioneer's* report at the time stated that when they were released on bail, they returned to Caxton Hall to recover their wits and prepare themselves for a second attack. However during the ensuing fight eleven members did manage to reach the Members' Lobby only to be ejected later.

The decision to go to prison was no small matter to the Leicester women and not done lightly. Their position was not of “rebels” but of thoughtful women ready to risk all in the struggle to win the vote. And although Alice Hawkins was not yet a member of the WSPU, prison had a profound effect on her as much of what she saw both horrified and alarmed her. This experience intensified her belief in women's rights and convinced her to form a branch of the WSPU in Leicester. From her prison notes it is possible to see this commitment grow as she recalled with some gloom the down-trodden women in Holloway,

One in particular that I saw in church set me thinking whatever could have brought her to prison. She was a girl not more than 16 with oh, such a sweet face and pathetic eyes. I could not keep my eyes off her every time we went to church... many's the time my heart ached for the poor women that are in for hard labour, for it is one long grind from early morning until late at night. ⁽¹²⁾

Unfortunately, the publicity surrounding the assault on Parliament did little back in Leicester to cement the growing tensions between the militant and non-militant groups. Although there is little evidence available to gauge the extent to which this difference of opinion went, it is clear from isolated reports in local newspapers that a rift was certainly

appearing, and almost from the start, local middle-class women of influence like Edith Gittins, Fanny Fullager, Charlotte and Isobel Ellis, Miss Von Petzold of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Society and Mrs Ramsay MacDonald of the Women's Labour League declined any association with the WSPU branch, and apologised in a letter for their non-attendance at the first meeting.⁽¹³⁾ Entirely reflecting the "respectable" view of the suffragist, they believed the actions of the WSPU were beyond the pale and dangerous. Indeed, this difference of attitude towards the methods employed by the different factions was clearly spelt out by Edith Gittins of the Leicester branch of the NUWSS in April 1907 when she addressed a meeting of the WLL. In this speech she admitted that opinions greatly differed between the two organisations and argued that the WSPU were not only putting the clock back in the female suffrage, it was also connecting "women with feeble violence and hysteria."⁽¹⁴⁾ Ironically, rather than embracing Christabel's desire to have women of influence and position to join the movement, the actions of February 1907 had precisely the opposite effect in Leicester as many working-class women within the boot and shoe industry flocked to join. However, not all middle-class women were given to Edith Gittins' point of view and later as the WSPU grew in influence and prestige towards the end of 1909, some younger women would turn their back on the NUWSS and join the WSPU.

In other ways too, the actions of the women in London alienated other organisations that could well have been natural allies. For instance, the actions of Alice Hawkins, Mrs Catlin, Miss Wells and Miss Knight appalled and horrified the new ILP member for Leicester, James Ramsay MacDonald and although he was by and large in favour of enfranchising women, he strongly rejected any



James Ramsay MacDonald.
Source, Leicestershire
Records Office.

method that was neither democratic nor peaceful. Interestingly enough, whereas others within the WSPU criticised the leadership for being undemocratic within the organisation, MacDonald attacked the WSPU for being undemocratic within the political system itself. The classic dilemma faced by any militant organisation is whether they become more moderate to gain acceptance within Parliament, or to retain their militant policies and be met with skepticism and hostility. By doing the latter, MacDonald believed the WSPU, by association, would bring into disrepute all other suffrage organisations and make them less effective. But more importantly, he argued that the WSPU was an elitist organisation that only sought to promote the interests of a small number of middle-class women thereby being unrepresentative of all women. In a letter to Alice Hawkins he complained that little good would come of such actions and warned her that any use of violence would completely alienate the Labour movement from the WSPU. As he wrote,

I really do not think you are doing any good to the cause. Up to a certain point the action of the WS and Pu (sic) was excellent. It stirred up public interest in the question, and would no doubt have secured that some Women's Enfranchisement Bill would have been passed this Parliament. Now I am afraid you have lost all chance of that. The Belfast resolution was carried owing to the foolish antics of those women who went to Cockermouth and Huddersfield and there will be a much bigger vote against women's enfranchisement at the I. L. P. Conference this coming year. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Notwithstanding, this reply came as something of a surprise to Alice Hawkins languishing in Holloway prison. It appears she had expected far greater support from MacDonald and regretted his reticence to get involved. Neither was she in any mood for compromise or, indeed, a retreat from the militant path she had now chosen. She was adamant that she was doing the right thing and argued that she was prepared to reject the Labour Party in favour of the WSPU if it continued to fail the women and their cause. All working people had "to suffer for every reform," ⁽¹⁶⁾ she wrote in a caustic letter back to Ramsay MacDonald and made her position more than clear when she added,

I was sorry to see the stand you take over the enfranchisement of women, for I quite thought you were in favour of it, but I see I was mistaken. Now as to the ILP voting against the enfranchisement of women (the Belfast Resolution) I hope not!! For if they do, I am afraid they will lose a great deal number of members. And just now I would think they are quite afraid to do that, as I understand the equality of the sexes is one of their chief items in it. (the ILP programme). ⁽¹⁷⁾

However, to understand MacDonald's position, an awareness of his politics is much needed. In essence, MacDonald was a reserved, aloof and obstinate man who owed more to his lowly Scottish background than he did to his political convictions, and as such came to advocate a slow, cautious approach that could only be termed as "socialism by instalments." This was all the more important in that it signalled a change of thought and direction within socialist circles. No longer was socialism to be an ideology of revolution, whereby power was achieved outside of government. Instead, it was destined to become, under the "Lossie Loon", a blueprint of change by evolutionary means. As MacDonald himself pointed out in *Socialism And Society*, ⁽¹⁸⁾

The scheme upon which humanity evolves to higher and more humane stages of existence is either rational or it is not. If it is not, all organised attempts to hasten reform and make it effective....are wasted efforts. ⁽¹⁹⁾

It is here in this passage that the kernel of Ramsay MacDonald's political philosophy can be found.

He had been a socialist since his youth in Lossiemouth where he read Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, in 1881. It was from this book, according to MacDonald's biographer, Hessel Tiltman, ⁽²⁰⁾ that MacDonald became familiar with the idea of common ownership of property and the principle of a greater share in the aggregate wealth of the nation. But more importantly, it galvanised MacDonald's thinking and allowed him, with

the help of Keir Hardie, to develop a new breed of socialist thought that would drive a wedge between the old continental revolutionary socialism and the milder, democratic British socialism that was more suited to this country. Yet ironically, this type of thinking was very similar to Edmund Burke's conservatism and alluded to the analogy of society as a social organism, and that the life of the organism is conducted through change. And like Burke he flinched from any social movement that directly attacked the status quo without regard to tradition and an evolutionary path to the past.

Consequently, when the militant campaign began in 1903, he lambasted its methods as being without the light of reason or morals. Instead, he argued that if women were to get the vote, then it must be done through the organisation of opinion and the operation of a constructive genius. The injustices found within society have to be resolved by what he thought as organic changes of a progressive nature. Social and political change was a scientific progress rather than a violent upheaval of popular revolt, however justified. It was not that MacDonald lacked the qualities to see the validity of the WSPU's arguments, especially when linked to the degrading poverty encountered by many working women, but the actions advocated by Mrs Pankhurst and her followers balked against everything he believed in. Violent protest and party disunity could only do more harm than good. Any changes to the franchise had to come from the whole of society, and not from any marginal section.

To do otherwise would jeopardise and endanger the organic unity. Evolution, not revolution was the way forward. It was about maintaining an organic wholeness and a moral growth based on a social intellect. It could never be about social divisions and class struggles; that was the doctrine and dogma of the European Marxist. In Britain it was the pursuit of moderate respectability and the need to work within the existing framework that was more important. Consequently the WSPU and their reactionary methods would only divide the different suffrage groups. This line of thinking was outlined by Ramsay MacDonald in a speech in 1908 at the Free Christian Church in Leicester; instead of promoting the actions of the WSPU as vital to the struggle, he highlighted the problems as he saw them when he said,

We are quite aware of the enthusiasm of the WSPU and of the quieter, more dignified work of the WSS. But they have not to convince men so much as their own sisters...as soon as the whole body of women ask for the vote they will unquestionably get it. ⁽²¹⁾

This was, of course, a classic clash between the very distinct traditional characteristics of British Socialism, that epitomised the bitter debate raging within the ranks of the Left. On the one hand, MacDonald espoused caution and patience, while on the other, Alice Hawkins was seeking to destroy a competitive system through the use of Syndicalism, tempered with the Social Democratic Federation's Marxist's philosophy of insurrection. She believed, along with other militant Labour leaders like Tom Mann and Ben Tillett, that the New Unions, to which women were now joining in large numbers, were destined to become the main democratic organisations of the future. They, not private capital, would own the industries their members worked in, like the small co-operative factories that were already springing up, and ultimately, they would control the country's economic and social policies. Yet, despite these grand designs, the importance of the co-operative ideal in forming socialist principles should not be overlooked in the Leicester experience, as other historians, notably Bill Lancaster, have noted,

The co-operative ideal had such potency that it had become central to the socialist platform and touched a nerve that ran to the heart of young socialist trade unionists during the early 1890s. ⁽²²⁾

But all this would be achieved, not by political action in terms of forced legislation, but by direct action outside of Parliament, inside the world of economics. There is, of course, a paradox here that fits uneasily within the context of what has been said, in that Alice Hawkins, although a Syndicalist, still argued that the vote was important to women in order that they might be able to change their condition through Government intervention. Further there is much difficulty in trying to trace a link with the influence of European Marxist ideology on trade union members in order to justify a revolutionary conspiracy,

but as Eric Hobsbawm argues in *Labouring Men*,⁽²³⁾ Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation was a successful training school for a succession of the most gifted working-class militants like Tom Mann and Will Thorne.⁽²⁴⁾ Moreover, Alice Hawkins had often made it clear that she was a follower of Tom Mann, and even linked her incarceration in Holloway in 1907 to his campaigns and earlier imprisonment for trade union militancy.

It might well be argued that Ramsay MacDonald was, in reality, only following the party line after Christabel's attack on the ILP candidates at the Cockermouth and Huddersfield by-elections in 1906, yet throughout the period, MacDonald, if nothing else, was totally consistent in his approach to the WSPU. This was aptly demonstrated at the ILP's conference at Derby in 1907; after the delegates sent Mrs Pankhurst a letter of support, he sarcastically retaliated in the *Labour Leader* that he "regretted the decision" and he thought that the "special applause of the women who have gone to prison on this occasion is false sentiment". He went on to argue that,

The resolution was carried because the delegates were full of generous thoughts...There is more of the Christmas spirit of charity in our ILP conference than any gathering that has ever met since the little gathering in the upper room of Jerusalem.⁽²⁵⁾

He complained, with some justification, that the WSPU only focused on one area of social inequality. Yet, while this might well have been true of the leadership in London, the evidence of the Leicester suffragettes suggested that they still regarded themselves as an integral part of the Labour movement and attempted to focus on many different aspects of social inequality faced by women. It is, however, important to note that for Alice Hawkins, the lack of political enfranchisement was the root of all women's problems. And while this might well have been a simplistic view, it was, nevertheless, a motivating factor that cannot be readily overlooked and explains much of their outlook and later actions. Moreover, the existing evidence also suggests that Leicester was not alone in this respect. As Sylvia Pankhurst pointed out, in May 1906 the Glasgow branch of the Union attempted to interview the President of the Local Government Board of Trade on behalf of

the unemployed, finally sending him a resolution supporting the demand of the Labour Party that unemployment should take precedence over all other questions during the session of Parliament. ⁽²⁶⁾

If this was true, then clearly a reassessment of MacDonald's early antagonism towards the suffragette movement is surely needed. One such answer might be found in Sandra Holton's book, *Feminism And Democracy*. ⁽²⁷⁾ She argued that his hostility to the WSPU indicated a degree of jealousy concerning the impact the suffragette campaign was having on women within the Labour

movement. This view is not as far-fetched as it might seem, in that both Keir Hardie and Sylvia Pankhurst later claimed that the Women's Labour League was formed by Mrs Margaret MacDonald, at the behest of Ramsay MacDonald, in 1906 to help stem the flow of women out of the Socialist and Labour movement. Indeed, Keir Hardie vehemently opposed the formation of the WLL on the grounds that he saw the organisation as a dangerous rival to the WSPU. It may be reasonable to assume, of course, that his relationship with Sylvia Pankhurst had much to do with this stance. Yet in one so complex, this could never be the only reason and it is important to remember, therefore, that during the early years of feminist militancy, Keir Hardie still regarded the WSPU as part of the Labour movement and to this end believed they warranted all due support. Interestingly enough, this position was not shared by some of the Leicester women as Alice Hawkins, one of the founder members of the Leicester branch, also helped form the local WLL with Margaret MacDonald. ⁽²⁸⁾



Source, Alice Hawkins' Scrapbook.
Alice Hawkins in her WSPU costume.

On returning to Leicester, Alice Hawkins, with the support of her husband Alfred,

continued to work towards the formation of a branch of the WSPU in Leicester. As it has already been pointed out, her experiences with the Pankhursts in gaol had a profound impression on her life and on her return to the town she set about realising her goal. With the help of her friend and fellow-social campaigner the Reverend F. L. Donaldson, they organised a meeting, again in the Boot and Shoe Trade Hall, for WSPU members to come and talk about their experiences of prison life.⁽²⁹⁾ This time, however, Alice Hawkins shared the platform with three WSPU veterans of the assault on Parliament, Mary Gawthorpe, Mrs Rothwell and Christabel Pankhurst. Thus, it was with the help of a national leader, Mary Gawthorpe, that Alice Hawkins was able to form the Leicester branch of the WSPU during March 1907.

In many ways Mary Gawthorpe was the natural choice to help start and organise the Leicester women. She was a working woman who had joined the suffrage movement by way of socialism and Labour politics.⁽³⁰⁾ In Leeds, as Alice Hawkins had done in Leicester, she had helped form a local branch of the Women's Labour League and had quickly become an executive committee member, meeting many leaders of the women's trade union movement, including Mary Macarthur and Gertrude Tuckwell.⁽³¹⁾ Again in much the same way as Alice Hawkins, she believed that the WSPU was dominated by socialist suffragists, although, "the national leadership was undoubtedly more determined on a separation from its socialist origins than many of its members."⁽³²⁾ However, in the early summer of 1907, the campaign was so successful that Alice Hawkins was able to state by 21 March that a Leicester branch of the WSPU had been set up⁽³³⁾ and that the first full meeting of the branch would take place on 9 April 1907 at the Welford Coffee House with Mrs Barnes, of Harrow Road, presiding.

The choice of venue is in itself an interesting one and probably reflects the temperance influence that was brought to the movement by women like Mrs Carryer, a Poor Law Guardian, and the Reverend Donaldson's wife. Coffee House meetings at the turn of the century were part and parcel of Victorian life in Leicester. As E. Hepple Hall pointed out in his study of coffee houses in Leicester, *Coffee Taverns, Cocoa Houses And Coffee Palaces*,⁽³⁴⁾ the Temperance Movement clearly saw the need for places where the

working man could meet, talk and play games away from the public house. However, according to *Spencer's Guide*, the excellent refreshments found within coffee houses tended to make them more popular with the more affluent middle-class rather than the class for whom they were primarily established.⁽³⁵⁾

Yet Leicester was not unique in this connection between suffrage societies and coffee houses, for as David Neville has pointed out, in Newcastle, socialists and suffrage groups also used similar venues, for example,

At the beginning of the century, Newcastle possessed a substantial artistic and cultural society. The Blakett Street / Northumberland Street area was home to a number of artists and the many small cafes were the meeting places for radicals and early socialists. One of those cafes - the Drawing Room Cafe - became the meeting place for the North Eastern Society for Women's Suffrage.⁽³⁶⁾

In Leicester, from notes taken at the meeting ⁽³⁷⁾ it is known that letters of apology for non-attendance were read by Miss Evelyn Carryer from Lady Rolleston and Mrs Margaret MacDonald. For her part, Margaret MacDonald saw nothing but disaster as a result of militancy. All her sentiments were against what the WSPU later stood for. As she said at the time, she felt far more injured than the brawlers were hurt themselves, and tackling Alice Hawkins head on, she scorned the idea that there was anything in common between the WSPU's militancy and revolution.

Although they had refused to join because of the growing militancy, others undoubtedly did, and it is interesting to note that not only were the ILP and the Liberal Party represented, but also a selection of working women from the Women's Conservative Association were also present. In a stirring speech to the new converts, Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst claimed that the success of the Union was due to the earnestness of purpose and self-sacrifice of individuality which actuated every member. ⁽³⁸⁾ Thus almost despite the early differences of opinion between the militant and non-militant factions, the claim

by the Leicester WSPU that they had broken down all political barriers appeared true. In reality, however, the formation of the Leicester branch of the WSPU represented a very fragile amalgamation of working-and middle-class women which would later collapse under the weight of militancy.

By all accounts, the first meeting was something of a success and not only had they placed womanhood before party politics, they also enrolled thirty new members for the organisation.⁽³⁹⁾ Unfortunately, their baptism of fire into the WSPU proved a costly affair for some of the Leicester delegates at Caxton Hall in February. As the minutes of the second Leicester WSPU's meeting demonstrated, at this meeting, letters of reply were read from local MP's rejecting a request that they should interest themselves on behalf of the Leicester girls (sadly unnamed) who were dismissed from their employment for "leaving their place of work without intimating where they were going."⁽⁴⁰⁾

Almost from the beginning the infant Leicester branch of the WSPU blossomed under the guidance of national leaders coming to Leicester over the summer months, not only to speak at open-air meetings in the market place and the Corn Exchange, but also to organise and instruct the local branch in the importance of "At Homes". These gatherings were started by the Pankhursts and were of immense value in clarifying WSPU strategy and monitoring the political situation both at national and local level. As Antonia Raeburn explained,

All organisers were encouraged to attend 'At Homes' and Mrs Pethick-Lawrance advocated that the membership should read at least two newspapers with differing political views each day.⁽⁴¹⁾

Of course, that does not mean to say that the importance of open-air meetings was not appreciated by local and national figures. Alice Hawkins and other working-class radicals like Bertha Clark and the trade unionist, Lizzie Willson understood only too well the importance of such events and concentrated their energies on such events in order to get their message across. Indeed, as Christabel Pankhurst told her followers in the spring of

1909,

In all parts of the country during the summer they will be holding open air meetings in parks, at street corners and at factory gates, for this is the best of all means at polarising a movement. ⁽⁴²⁾

It is important to stress here the importance of such gatherings in an age before mass-information technology like radio and television. Yet, in Leicester the first big meeting on 6 June 1907 proved to be something of a flop when bad weather prevented Miss Gawthorpe, the guest speaker from Clement's Inn, from delivering her message. ⁽⁴³⁾ Still undeterred, many more meetings were conducted with, perhaps, the most successful occurring during July when both Alice Hawkins and Sylvia Pankhurst addressed what was deemed to be at the time a "huge crowd in the market place." ⁽⁴⁴⁾

Both Sylvia Pankhurst and Mary Gawthorpe had been in and around Leicestershire since 11 June when they had completed a successful campaign in the Rutland by-election against the Liberal candidate W. F. Lyon in Oakham. It is not clear as to what extent the local WSPU played in this campaign, but during May a combined deputation of local WSPU members and the NUWSS arrived to see Evan Barlow, Lyon's election agent in Oakham. ⁽⁴⁵⁾ At this meeting, both Evelyn Carryer of the WSPU, and Miss Palliseer, parliamentary secretary for the NUWSS, pledged to render all assistance if he would openly support women's suffrage. However, no pledge was received and both the WSPU and the NUWSS energetically went into opposition to make it a three-cornered fight. Although their political strategy differed and their election policies frequently conflicted, as Holton maintained, there were numerous instances of co-operation between the two wings of the movement during the early years of militancy. However, as the WSPU broke new ground in their fight for the vote, the different movements drifted even further apart.

After the election, Christabel Pankhurst claimed the tactics of the WSPU allowed the Conservative candidate to almost double his majority, but as Martin Pugh, in *Women's*

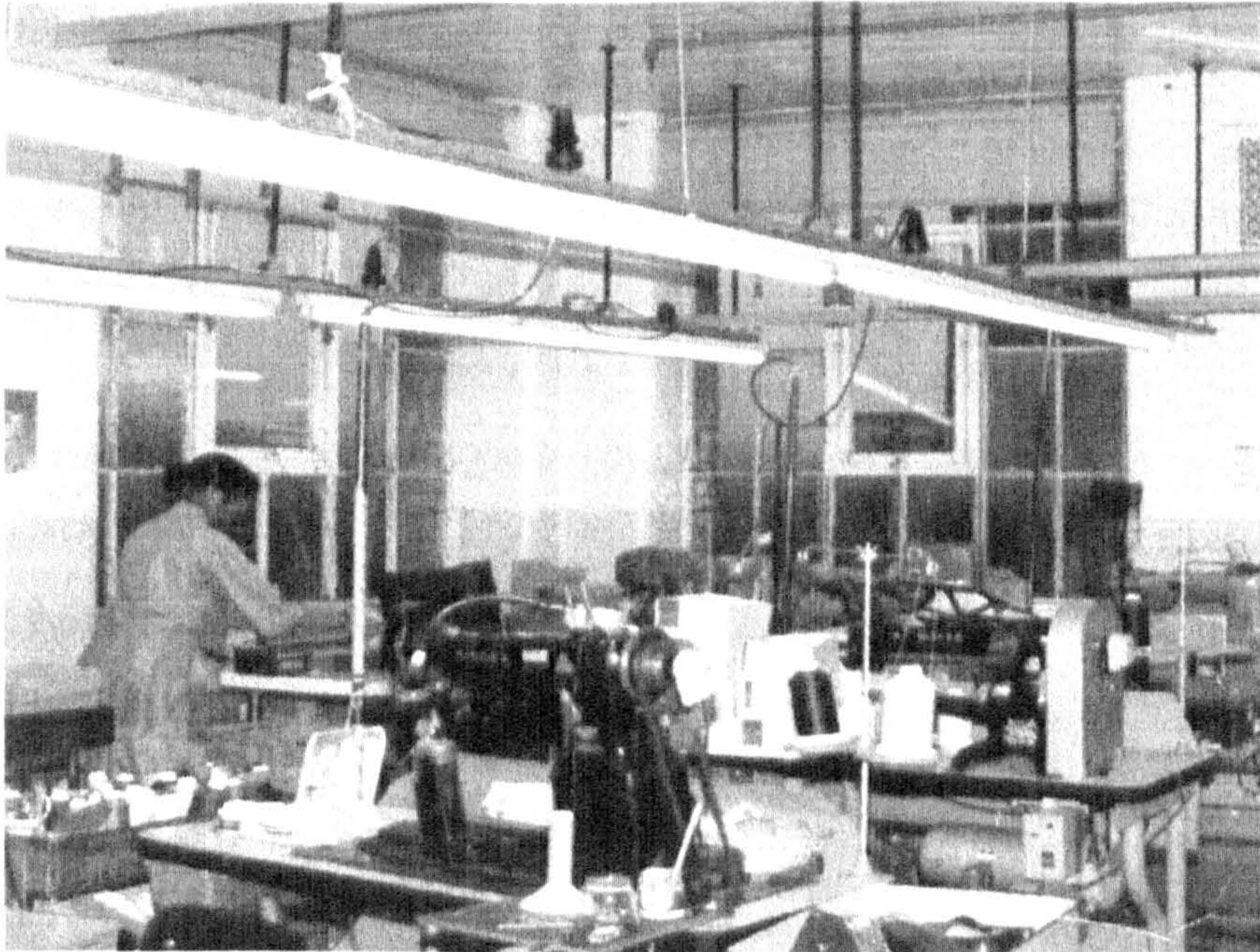
Suffrage in Britain, points out, there is no serious way of assessing the real influence of the WSPU at these by-elections. They were, however, a real attempt on behalf of the Union to make life difficult for any returning Government MPs. This strategy entirely reflected the policy instigated by Christabel to put the WSPU on the political map. Indeed, Christabel made this point quite clear and argued that any denial of the WSPU existence and importance amounted to self-delusion, "But this like other illusions will disappear as they find it more and more impossible to get elected to the House Of Commons."⁽⁴⁶⁾

In some ways however, Sylvia Pankhurst differed from the other members of her family in that she sought not only to mobilise middle-class women, but also whole sections of the women's labour movement. As a committed socialist, she naturally saw the benefits of organising women both in and out of the trade union movement. Thus, she was instinctively drawn to the working-class women who were to make up the sum of the WSPU in Leicester. It was here that she began to formulate her ideas of working with working-class women that would materialise some years later when she would go and work amongst the working-class women in the East End of London. In her later book, *The Suffragette Movement. An Intimate Account Of Persons And Ideals*,⁽⁴⁷⁾ she recalled the start of the WSPU in Leicester and the beginning of her long campaign to try and establish and expand an industrial base for the WSPU with working women. As she wrote,

I moved to Leicester to work amongst the women in the shoemaking industry. Mrs Hawkins, the WSPU secretary was also active in the Bootmaker's Union. She introduced me to a small producer's co-operative factory. (The Equity) ...At night I held meetings for the local WSPU, amongst whom only Mrs Hawkins, as yet, dared mount the platform. The members were then almost all working-class. One of them was a collector of laundry accounts, struggling to support a younger sister and brother. She had published a first novel and was casually employed by a local newspaper which obligingly permitted her to give



Female shoe workers in the Equity Co-operative boot and shoe manufacturer. Painted by Sylvia Pankhurst in the spring of 1907.
Source, Richard Pankhurst, *Artist and Crusader*.



Inside the Equity boot and shoe manufacturer today.
Source, Zoe Oughton.

good reports of our work. * (48)

During Sylvia's summer sojourn in Leicester, her stay was cut short by a telegram from Christabel recalling her back to London to support the family against what she saw as a damaging rift between Mrs Billington-Greig and herself. In spite of every effort on the part of Mrs Pankhurst to maintain a show of unity, destructive criticisms of their methods and leadership led to the charge that the organisation was undemocratic. To some extent, this observation was more than true as it had become clear to the Pankhursts that it would be impossible to run the Union on a representational basis and, as a result, just a month before the national conference, Mrs Pankhurst tore up the WSPU's constitution and announced that a new committee was to be selected.** As a result, the WSPU came

* This woman called herself Lydia and had been writing a women's column for *The Pioneer* since 1902.

* * The national WSPU, under the control of Emmeline & Christabel Pankhurst were now to be responsible for the entire organisation. From this point on, it was decided that there would be no membership fee, only the signing of this pledge, "I endorse the objects and methods of the WSPU and I hereby undertake not to support the candidate of any political party at Parliamentary elections until women have obtained the Parliamentary vote".

under the control of Mrs Pankhurst and local WSPU groups would be subjected to direction from Clement's Inn.

For many sections within the organisation, this centralisation of WSPU policy proved to be too bitter a pill to swallow and Mrs Despard, the leader of several assaults on Parliament, and Teresa Billington-Greig resigned their membership and formed The Women's Freedom League. As a result, the latter part of 1907 was to be something of a turning-point in the outlook of the WSPU both nationally and locally. As the organisation grew and became more militant, around the country splits began to appear that would ultimately cleave off something in the region of 20% of the membership.⁽⁴⁹⁾ These rifts were more or less a direct result of the early success the WSPU achieved. Indeed by the end of 1907 there were already over seventy branches nationwide. As Antonia Raeburn commented in *The Militant Suffragettes*, the movement had become so popular that many of old-established suffrage societies had joined the militants while still clinging to the idea of a democratic organisation.

As elsewhere, this schism was potentially damaging to the continuation of the WSPU in Leicester, as the debate now focused around the need for democratic input into the movement and several women declared that they would not tolerate what Ramsay MacDonald would later call that "evil junta."⁽⁵⁰⁾ But, despite a few dissenting voices, notably Mrs Catlin, wife of a local councillor, and later in the year, Miss Carryer, the split seemed to have had little effect on the movement locally and as early as June 1907 the Leicester WSPU agreed at a meeting to participate in the forthcoming testimonials to be presented to Mrs Billington-Greig.

For her part, Miss Carryer appeared to have become increasingly concerned, both at the lack of democratic procedures within the organisation and the increasing level of militant action. Consequently, by May 1908 she had, to all intents and purposes, broken her links with the WSPU and moved over to the more democratic and less militant NUWSS.⁽⁵¹⁾ However, despite her disquiet at the methods of control employed by the Pankhursts, the tactics of the militants very much appealed to her radicalism as she continued to subscribe

financially to the WSPU through to 1914. Moreover, she occasionally joined WSPU meetings when famous celebrities came to town.

Paradoxically, her desertion occurred almost in spite of an emotive appeal by Mrs Pethick-Lawrence to hold the movement together. She had arrived in the town at the request of Mrs Carryer to speak at a meeting in the Welford Coffee House and attempted to rally the troops around the new leadership. She argued that the measures taken by Mrs Pankhurst were right and claimed that the militant actions the WSPU had taken over the previous two years had brought the whole issue of women's suffrage to the fore. As she explained, "the WSPU had made a moribund thing and live a burning question."⁽⁵²⁾

In the end Mrs Pethick-Lawrence had little to fear in the way of a mass desertion from the Leicester branch. The majority of working women who made up the active membership stayed loyal to the Pankhursts. Alice Hawkins and Bertha Clark, both strong trade Union members not only appeared to submerge their loyalties to the ILP but also to the labour movement in general by accepting the Pankhursts' dictum that all members could not belong to another political organisation while they were in the WSPU. This complete acceptance of WSPU policy was later demonstrated in October 1907 when, because of a quirk in the Franchise Act, some women were allowed, not only to vote, but also stand as local councillors. This was too good a chance to miss and the WSPU actively supported Evelyn Carryer as an Independent Woman, against Harry Woolley, the Labour candidate in the Wycliffe Ward.⁽⁵³⁾ Needless to say, the WSPU failed to attract enough support to allow Evelyn Carryer to win, possibly because not all women had the vote nor could they claim to be a major political party speaking for working-class concerns. However, it was a step in the right direction and complied with WSPU policy to make political life difficult for all parties.

The group were at this time, regardless of the initial mix between the social classes, a living example of what Bernard Shaw believed women should be, namely a Trade Unionist, a Suffragette and last, but not least, a Socialist.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Without doubt, Alice Hawkins and some of her colleagues, like Evelyn Close, Bertha Clark and Mrs Barnes,

were already all three, and while national issues and policies were being taken in London, the Leicester branch undertook to do what they could do best, to fight for the interests of working women.

All in all, the first year of the Leicester WSPU had been something of a success. The movement had survived its first split and mainly through the efforts of Alice Hawkins and Bertha Clark, the Union had managed to recruit a substantial number of dissatisfied women from the Boot and Shoe industry. Subsequently, Alice Hawkins felt justifiably confident to proclaim that she spoke for the majority of working women when she sent her telegram to Asquith in December 1907 saying,

Is there any possible chance of votes for women being included in King's Speech? Kindly reply.... A hundred thousand Leicester women await your answer. ⁽⁵⁵⁾

As might be expected, the Prime Minister declined to answer and Alice Hawkins' plea went unheard. However, the resolve of the Leicester women was as strong as ever and over the following years it would stand the test of time.

III

To the North, in Nottingham, the situation was somewhat different in that the WSPU was not formed by working women, and makes a striking contrast to the experience and situation in Leicester. Despite the potential number of women working in the hosiery and lace trade at below the average wage it might well be supposed that there would be a massive ground-swell in favour of female emancipation. However, nothing could have been further from the truth. For reasons that have been outlined in chapter two, these women had none of the facile optimism that was to be a bench-mark of the Leicester branch, nor indeed did they appear to have the motivation nor the interest in addressing their conditions through the Pankhurst organisation. Instead, the real power behind any future Nottingham WSPU branch would, as had been the case in London, come from the

middle-class and independent women within the new professions, like doctors and schoolteachers like Miss Burgess, headmistress of a local Nottingham school and Dr Letitia Fairfield of the Nottingham General Hospital. Unfortunately little is known of these women other than they were prepared to commit themselves to the cause in a public way. For her part, Dr Fairfield not only chaired many meetings in and around Nottingham, but also instructed less able speakers in the art of public speaking. ⁽⁵⁶⁾

In comparison, the Nottingham WSPU, was formed in December 1907 by middle-class women who were attracted to the movement through Christabel Pankhurst's controversial visit to the City's University College in November 1907 rather than by their own ambitions and desires. Both Christabel and Mrs Minnie Baldock, a fitter's wife from Canning Town, had been in the area since the middle of October 1907, and had addressed several meetings around the county with little success. But, at the end of November, when they penetrated into the town's centre itself, they found women willing to support their movement in a more practical way. Yet even here, progress was slow and discouraging, and Christabel Pankhurst's message that there should be no taxation without representation ⁽⁵⁷⁾ was received with little interest. However, events were about to change and a rejection by Nottingham University to let Christabel address students, coupled with a near riot in the Mechanics' Hall at the beginning of December, aroused the interest of local women in votes for women. ⁽⁵⁸⁾

In many ways, Christabel's penetration into the Nottingham area was a turning point for many middle-class women within the town who had long considered the suffrage question from a distance, but without any real sense of direction. Instead, mainly because they were affluent and untroubled by earning a living, they appeared to have lacked the motivation to apply themselves to the cause. Of course there had been the NUWSS, but, as in Leicester, the organisation was somewhat dowdy and lacked the ability to inspire a new generation of radical young women who needed the spontaneous inspiration that Christabel could give. On this point it is interesting to note that all the known women who formed the WSPU in Nottingham had not been previously involved in suffrage politics before. Instead they were, as the Nottingham suffragette, Helen Watts later recalled,

entirely indifferent to the cause and

blamed and noodled just as everyone else did, but in quite an unthinking way.... We saw advertisements of meetings and at last went to a meeting ourselves. ⁽⁵⁹⁾

Yet despite this later interest in votes for women, before the winter of 1907, there appeared little demand for the WSPU to come to Nottingham from either social class. Unlike Leicester, there had been no women elected to the Trades' Council to help promote women's issues in Nottingham nor influence its male members to accept Christabel's offer to come and speak at one of their meetings. Instead Christabel's offer to address the town's Trades' Council remained unwanted and unanswered. Instead Christabel Pankhurst had come to the area under her own volition and attempted to talk to working-class women. However, Christabel Pankhurst's initial message, conveyed from the back of a potato lorry in Trinity Square in the pouring rain, failed to spark the interest of all but a few supporters. ⁽⁶⁰⁾ However, her arrival did have some impact, albeit indirectly, as the press announced her appearance with all due regards as to a visiting celebrity. In Mansfield, one of the most prominent working-class branches of the local NUWSS looked on the visit with some concern and attempted to defuse her rhetoric by making their own position clear. In a meeting held in a local church hall, the group suggested that,

It was not English for any man or woman to go to a meeting with the distinct purpose of interrupting it. The attitude adopted by some extremists brings ridicule upon their cause. ⁽⁶¹⁾

But, in the end, it need not have worried about losing working-class support to the WSPU. For despite Christabel's gifted eloquence on the hustings, she failed to make any inroads with the women working in the lace and tobacco industries. Instead, the desire to form another local branch of the WSPU came from those who had little to do with the world of necessary work.

For their part, they were not initially attracted to the movement by a sense of injustice or by a burning passion to involve themselves in women's politics. Instead, their attention was caught by the controversy surrounding Christabel's attempts to address the student's union in the City's University College. The subsequent publicity and the students' treatment of her aroused some interest, although it bordered on the curious rather than the dedicated feminist. However, this was to matter not, for once Christabel had got them into the meeting hall she had converted their mild interest into a serious commitment. She had arrived in Nottingham for the second time, some weeks earlier, and attempted to fulfil a promise made to the students to address the City's University College Student's Association. However, the college authorities reacted unsympathetically to the cause and refused to allow the meeting to go ahead. ⁽⁶²⁾

Indeed, even when the college appeared temporarily to reverse its decision, two of its most prominent college board of guardians, Alderman J Greenwood and William Bradshaw resigned in protest. ⁽⁶³⁾ This decision not only plunged the college into a ferocious debate on free speech, but it helped set the tone for further WSPU meetings around the city over the coming months and years. Indeed, very few WSPU demonstrations around the town escaped rowdyism and violence from Liberal students. Yet not all students within the university felt this way and many openly attacked their colleagues for their lack of Liberal principles. In essence, as it has been pointed out, the problem for many was that one of the major tenets of Liberal thinking, free speech, was being abused and was being denied those that sought to express their views in public. Indeed, as one sarcastic student put it,

We shall have to be careful or else we shall have people thinking that a university college is the natural home of free thinking..... and free speaking. ⁽⁶⁴⁾

But it also polarised many of the antagonists in the debate as to whether the WSPU itself should be allowed the privilege of giving public talks when they themselves heckled government ministers and disrupted public meetings. As one dissenting student made

clear when he wrote an open letter to the *Nottingham Evening Post* in December 1907,

It was our intention to treat Miss Christabel Pankhurst in the same way as they treated our friend, Mr Asquith. For my part, I myself love fairplay and therefore I consider it my duty as an Asquith supporter to help upset these ladies. ⁽⁶⁵⁾

It is here that the polemic between the two ideologies comes into sharp relief. In essence both sides were of a Liberal persuasion and both were predominantly middle-class. Even the Nottingham NUWSS joined with the debate and sided with the students when they wrote in the *Nottingham Guardian* that they were in many ways thankful for their intervention in attracting attention for votes for women, but were shocked at their methods and denounced the policy of refusing to let the Liberals conduct their meetings without interruption. ⁽⁶⁶⁾

Yet despite the problems, the meeting eventually went ahead on the following Saturday night in the Woodborough Road Baptist Schoolrooms and despite all the fuss was well attended with few interruptions. Questions were then put to Miss Aeta Lamb, who told the audience that the WSPU was seeking a limited franchise for women on the same terms as men and that to obtain the vote was a stepping-stone to other reforms and privileges. ⁽⁶⁷⁾ Aeta Lamb was a rather emancipated young woman of about 20 years of age, who had been brought up in London in a shabby but genteel home after her father's death in 1892. Her knowledge of political history, particularly the history of the women's movement was said to be encyclopaedic. However, after a mental and physical collapse in 1908, she retired from militant action and became the WSPU's chief researcher and archivist. ⁽⁶⁸⁾

As was hoped, the media reports generated a wide interest for local women and quick to follow up her success Christabel hastily organised a meeting three days later in the Mechanics' Hall, Nottingham to address a wider audience. ⁽⁶⁹⁾ Without doubt, the women of Nottingham had been drawn to the WSPU as a direct result of their reception by men.

In the local press, women began to express their concerns at an inferior position in society and came to demand the vote by way of recompense. As one concerned, anonymous, writer makes clear that,

Now the (council) elections are near at hand, and spinsters and widows are eligible to sit in the council chamber, I should like to see a lady candidate for this ward. (Sherwood Ward) I believe she would, if returned, be a check on the extravagancies in the education department. ⁽⁷⁰⁾

Another letter followed this theme and pointed out that (sic)

A woman, with 22 years of hard work as a nurse... earns an income of 5/- a week. A quarter of this is taken by rates and taxes for which she is denied the Parliamentary vote (the money) is given to ditchers and boys with latchkeys.....who then teach the violin to their own class. She has to then live on tea, bread, butter, cheese and inferior bacon. When we read accounts of the waste of rates and taxes drawn from such women.....do we feel that some thing is wrong with our system of voting? ⁽⁷¹⁾

However, this next meeting was destined to fall foul of the young Liberal students and several rowdy undergraduates sought to continue their war with the WSPU and disrupted the meeting with whistles and loud songs. At first Christabel stood her ground, but after the stage was invaded she reluctantly disbanded the meeting.

Curiously enough, one of the college committee members, Alderman J Greenwood was at the meeting and appealed, with little conviction, to the students for calm. ⁽⁷²⁾ However, when he was ignored, he made it clear that he believed the actions of the students vindicated his earlier position when he resigned. While publicly regretting the break-up of the meeting, privately he was delighted and more than in favour of it. Consequently, he

withdrew his resignation from the college. ⁽⁷³⁾ Yet despite the fact that the meeting was wrecked, Christabel Pankhurst was more than satisfied with the outcome. She knew that they had won an important public relations battle and that the widespread publicity surrounding the debacle was “a good advertisement.... for it will bring many people over to our side.” ⁽⁷⁴⁾ On this she was more than correct, the frustration felt by many women at not hearing Christabel speak prompted them to organise another meeting for the following week. Only this time the meeting would be for women only. ⁽⁷⁵⁾

After the Mechanics' Hall meeting, Christabel left Nottingham at 8.30 am the next morning to attend to matters in London. However, she promised to return the following week and left the two London suffragettes, Aeta Lamb and Elsa Gye behind to not only organise the second meeting in the Lower Circus Street Hall, but to also help put together the fledgling Nottingham branch. As Aeta Lamb said at the time,

In the first place everybody's attention has been directed to women's suffrage and in the second place, an enormous number of sympathisers have been brought to our side. ⁽⁷⁶⁾

In some respects she was more than right and, indeed, many local women, deeply incensed by the treatment ⁽⁷⁷⁾ meted out by the university students, were determined to make themselves heard. Unfortunately, the numbers and social background of these women is hard to gauge, but during the Nottingham branch's first year the numbers based on local press reports were relatively small and mainly consisted of middle-class women like Helen Watts and Miss Burgess, the first branch secretary.

The second meeting was more than a huge success and it was at this point that several local women stepped forward to volunteer to start the branch. Helen Watts, a middle-class woman from Lenton, later recalled the euphoria of the time and pinpoints the moment when the Nottingham branch was first formed,

I wonder how many of us who are here now were present at that

women's meeting in Lower Circus Street Hall..... when Christabel spoke. I for one, will always remember that occasion vividly, both as the first time I heard Christabel speak and as the occasion of my joining the Union. ⁽⁷⁸⁾

In 1907, women of all social backgrounds in Nottingham had a choice. Indeed, both the Women's Liberal Association and the local NUWSS had been recruiting women in the fight for the franchise. Yet at the start of the campaign, unlike the experience in Leicester, there appeared to be little difference ideologically between the militants and non-militants. Both groups were predominately middle-class and like elsewhere around the country, * members often joined the others' meetings without any apparent embarrassment or a feeling of being in the wrong group.

For instance, when Mrs Pankhurst arrived in Nottingham to support the new WSPU branch in April 1908, at the Victoria Station Hotel, it would appear from the number of attendees identified by the *Nottingham Guardian* from around four hundred and fifty women, that the audience was divided about evenly between militant and non-militant members of the middle-class. Although this list is, by no means, comprehensive, nor indeed is it an indicator of social class or identifies the group to which the women belonged, it still serves to point the way. For example, by detailed use of local directories it was possible to discover addresses and locate them in various parts of the town. This helped to identify their social class in that it was reasonable to assume that working women could ill afford to live in the properties identified.

Moreover, by examining the names of women mentioned by the local press attending various political meetings of their respective organisations, it was possible to assert their political allegiance. For instance, most meetings held by the NUWSS were reported in depth and often the reporter would detail those attending. This was more than useful in identifying the organisation's membership.

* In other local studies, notably David Neville's To Make Their Mark, and George J Barnsby's The Struggle For The Vote In The Black Country, both note this unity of purpose.

List of identified Militant and Non-Militant women in attendance at the Victoria Station Hotel, Nottingham, 12 April 1908. ⁽⁷⁹⁾

Table 3.1

The WSPU	The NUWSS
Mr & Mrs, Miss Thorpe	Colonel & Lady Rolleston
Mr & Miss Rothera	Mr & Mrs Enfield
Mrs Oswald	Mrs & Miss Dowson
Nurse Hutchinson	Mrs McPherson
Mr & Mrs Woolett	Mr & Miss Kentish
Mr & Mrs G. Wallis	Dr Henwood
Miss Wallis	Miss Pemberton
Mrs Denman	Dr Sarah Grey
Miss Barrett. B.S.c	Mrs Cattle
Miss Burgess	Miss Green
Rev & Mrs Alan Watts	
Misses Watts	

(The WSPU members were identified by various newspaper reports, including *Votes For women*, which listed women who attended WSPU meetings between 1907 and 1914. The NUWSS members appear in NUWSS records in Nottingham’s Records Office.) ⁽⁸⁰⁾

Following the inaugural meeting in December 1907, the first militant action in Nottingham occurred the next day and possibly reflects the timing of the women's meeting in the Lower Circus Street Hall. It had been known for some time that Asquith was due in Nottingham to address the local Liberal Association on Free Trade. As with all Liberal meetings at this time, the hall was effectively shut off to all women, other than those that were known and could be trusted. As Mr Arnold Morley, who was to preside over the meeting declared with some pomp, any suffragette attempting to get into the meeting would need the combined qualities of “Sherlock Holmes and de Blauitz.” He continued

that no woman ticketed or unticketed will be allowed to enter without rigorous inquiries being made as to who she is. ⁽⁸¹⁾ However, almost despite this proud boast, this did not stop four WSPU members from gaining entry. Under the direction of Elsa Gaye and Aeta Lamb, the women managed to interrupt Asquith and ask "When are you going to give votes to women?" ⁽⁸²⁾ As usual they were all ejected into the street where they were met by some of the local women who greeted them with applause.

By the end of 1907, the Nottingham branch was firmly established and ready for action and its comparison with the Leicester branch illustrates that there can be no one correct way of looking at what constituted a WSPU branch at this time. Enigmatic as ever, Christabel Pankhurst told a meeting in Nottingham towards the end of 1907 that

politics touched the home. It was time that women came and saw that the housing question was tackled. There were laws affecting the employment of women. As women cared for the future of the race and the condition of children, they should have the vote. ⁽⁸³⁾

This speech was clearly aimed at working-class women and begs the question did many working-class women attempt to join, or did they indeed join but were relegated to the back? Unfortunately, the answer at this time is impossible to give as there is little or no evidence to suggest that working women were included. But what is clear is that the branch was, at least, fronted by middle-class women with philanthropic beliefs and our perception as to the exact nature of the branch entirely depends upon the evidence of the women sampled; hence the rest, whoever they were, are left vague. However, much of this research in Nottingham points to at least two major group factors, wealth and education and this offers us a good framework in which to work. But this also allows for subjectivity, bias and other kinds of error to creep in and the reality might well have been that the Nottingham WSPU also started out as a working-class organisation, but at this point in time it is impossible to be sure.

Consequently, it must be assumed that the social and economic backgrounds of these

women within the East Midlands were diverse, and accordingly varied from town to town. In Leicester, the formation of the branch clearly shows that they were quite different from those in Nottingham and later Northampton, although this branch was not formed until 1911 and under different circumstances to those found in Leicester and Nottingham. Consequently in Leicester, their interests were directed at the conscious political attitudes of, not only themselves, but also those of the local ILP. However as the Pankhursts increased their grip on the Union as a whole, much of this was to change. In contrast, from the evidence surrounding the formation of the Nottingham branch, an interpretation of the data allows the assumption to be made that the branch was made up initially of middle-class women, and their independence and freedom to express themselves as they saw fit is one of the prime factors regarding their view of themselves and what they could achieve. They believed, as did the Leicester women, that they could do something to improve their lot, or more importantly the lot of working women. This was not only fundamental to the individual's political beliefs, but also to their attitude towards authority. They were, in the main, more willing to take risks and were unconcerned about the social stigma that went with going to jail. Of course, many working women also went to jail, but the economic and social restrictions on these women were far greater.

In general, it was because of this diverse social and economic background that their motivations were undoubtedly different and reflected to a larger degree their social outlook and corresponds with an almost left-wing philosophical view that demanded political freedom for oneself and for all women, although this condition was later overturned when it was decreed by the Pankhursts that the fight for the vote should only focus on middle-class women, a stance that ultimately led to the withdrawal of Labour support in Leicester. Nevertheless, at first the intentions were clearly there, expressed in the sentiments of Helen Watts in Nottingham. She believed in a freedom which allowed the individual to make her own happiness and develop the principle of equality without being in opposition to others.

Indeed, this freedom would only be possible if it was developed on the basis of solidarity

with other women from different social backgrounds. Political doctrines cover not only a number of attitudes, but also appeal to specific emotions and passions, and on this note the Pankhursts were more than able to channel the dissatisfaction many women felt at the time, but it was to a specific end that had little to do with solidarity. What damage the Pankhursts did when they divorced themselves from the working-class is hard to say, but it undoubtedly had a major effect on the way in which the WSPU was later to develop.

CHAPTER THREE

The Birth Of An Organisation. The Political Motives And Social Background Of The Membership In Nottingham and Leicester.

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- (4) Ibid, p.83.
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- (10) Newark Museum, Leicester, No Reference, Letter To Ramsay MacDonald, dated 22 February 1907.
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- (31) Ibid, p.122.
- (32) Ibid, p.115.
- (33) The Pioneer, 23 March 1907.
- (34) Quoted in Malcolm Elliott, The Coffee- House And Cocoa-House Movement, Leicester, Leicestershire Archaeological Historical Society, p. 59.
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- (36) David Neville, To Make Their Mark, Newcastle upon Tyne, History Workshop Trust, North East Labour History Society Centre For Northern Studies, Department of Historical and Critical Studies, University of Northumbria, 1997, p.16.
- (37) The Pioneer, 13 April 1907.
- (38) The Pioneer, 13 April 1907.

- (38) The Pioneer, 13 April 1907.
- (39) The Pioneer, 13 April 1907.
- (40) The Pioneer, 23 March 1907.
- (41) Antonia Raeburn, Militant Suffragettes, Newton Abbot, Michael Joseph, 1974, p. 39.
- (42) Nottingham Guardian, 8 April 1909.
- (43) The Pioneer, 6 June 1907.
- (44) The Pioneer, 20 April 1907.
- (45) Leicester Mercury, 5 June 1907.
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- (48) Ibid, p. 263.
- (49) Andrew Rosen, Rise Up Women : The Militant Campaign Of The WSPU 1903 - 1914, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974. p.92.
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- (73) Nottingham Guardian, 3 December 1907.
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Chapter Four

GROWTH OF THE PANKHURST AUTOCRACY AND ITS CONSEQUENCE ON THE LEICESTER AND NOTTINGHAM BRANCHES

As 1908 dawned with its high hopes and optimism, it was to be something of an *annus mirabilis* for the WSPU in Leicester and Nottingham. At the beginning of the year both branches were in place and ready to face the coming fight. Despite the fact that Leicester had been formed some nine months before, Nottingham had made up for lost time and, on the face of it, was ready for action. ⁽¹⁾ However, the strengths and weaknesses of both branches were to be thrown into sharp relief by factors that were outside their control. In Clement's Inn a shift of focus had taken place that can now be seen as an independent variable in the process of change that was to sweep across the provincial branches from 1908 onwards. For example, not only did the Leicester women appear to move away from their Labour roots towards a more feminist, militant position, but the branch also began slowly to change in social composition with the enrolment of a selection of middle-class women.

Of course, it can be argued that these two factors were inexorably linked, that indeed the influx of a younger, more militant middle-class woman would inevitably change the branch, but this metamorphosis was not a local phenomenon and had its roots elsewhere. Certainly, and for reasons that will be addressed later, it can be traced back to the directions and instructions given out by the leadership in London. On 30 May in the Exeter Hall, Mrs Pethick-Lawrence told the audience, "If you have an influential position, socially or professionally, we want you!" ⁽²⁾ Some years later Christabel Pankhurst put it more firmly,

working-women's movement was of no value: their lives were too hard, their education too meagre to equip them for the struggle. ⁽³⁾

Instead, the fight was to be controlled and conducted by women who had "drawn prizes in the lucky bag of life."⁽⁴⁾ On these points, however, it is important to bear in mind that any policies introduced by the Pankhursts and the Pethick-Lawrences in London would, by their very nature, have a direct influence on the membership within the East Midlands. The WSPU was not, by any stretch of the imagination, a democratic organisation where members could vote on or implement policy issues; instead when directives and policies were instigated by Clement's Inn, the branches were expected to follow them without question. Indeed to do otherwise meant that members ran the risk of expulsion. Moreover, as Sandra Holton points out,

An inner circle formed around Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst which was increasingly intolerant of any challenge to its dominance within the WSPU, and apparently jealous of such public attention and personal loyalty as might from time to time attach to other charismatic figures among its supporters. ⁽⁵⁾

In order to understand this crucial shift and the motives behind the Pankhursts' desire to control the WSPU at a regional level, it is necessary to appreciate the concerns and anxieties within the personality of Christabel Pankhurst. She, more than any one else, was responsible for the way in which the branches would grow and her insistence on recruiting middle-class women into the organisation altered and distorted the Leicester branch most. In the early years, the WSPU consistently argued that class was unimportant, ⁽⁶⁾ and all recruits were urged to leave any class feelings behind. But in reality, and despite the constant calls for working women to come and join them in their fight, they were considered relatively unimportant to the struggle. Not only that, but throughout the summer and autumn of 1907, both Christabel and her mother were becoming increasingly concerned at the rapid expansion of the WSPU within the North of England and Scotland, some of whose members were not entirely bound emotionally or

psychologically to the Pankhurst family. Instead many were independent socialists with ideas of their own and more than willing to support Mrs Billington - Greig's attempts to further the autonomy of the new branches.⁽⁷⁾ As Rosen has pointed out,

The Pankhurst fears were largely caused by the influx of new WSPU members who had never laid eyes on the Pankhursts or become pledged to their policies, and thus, could not be relied upon to follow Christabel's decisions without question.⁽⁸⁾

Indeed, Christabel, herself was amazed at the lack of deference displayed by some of the northern branches. As she pointed out,⁽⁹⁾ "The WSPU had been founded and led by Mother and myself... We went ahead and the others went with us."⁽¹⁰⁾ As it has been pointed out in the previous chapter, before this most branches were, in many respects, autonomous, and in general were free to run their own affairs as long as the basic policies formulated in Clement's Inn were followed.

But first this new and formidable obstacle of branch autonomy had to be removed. During the summer of 1907, Mrs Billington-Greig had sought to further Leicester's independence by drawing up a scheme that would allow it a Provincial Council with a treasury of their own. Further, other evidence received by Clement's Inn convinced the leadership that a spirit of independence was rife in the North and many branches challenged the number of paid organisers sitting on the WSPU Committee. In turn the Pankhursts sought to counter what they saw as a challenge to their authority and promptly cancelled the annual conference, due to be held on 12 October, and challenged all who could not accept their leadership to resign from the Union. Instead, two meetings were held in September where Mrs Pankhurst told the gathering that in future she would have no one on the committee who was not in absolute accord with her. Further, on 15 September, Mrs Pankhurst sent letters to all the local WSPU branches informing them of the changes and asking them to support the National Women's Social and Political Union with a pledge of loyal support. In Leicester the letter was received with some dismay,⁽¹¹⁾ as a few women resigned their membership, but by the time the pledge cards arrived it appears, through the continuity of

donations noted in *Votes For Women* that most agreed to sign and continued to serve the Pankhurst cause.

With the battle for control now won, the Pankhursts were in a strong position to stamp their hegemony on the Union as a whole, and as a result, not only were the branches to lose their relative independence, they were now to be subjected to a shift in personnel. Consequently, at the beginning of 1908, and despite the fact that a coexistence between the classes had existed for some considerable period of time, emphasis was instructed to be placed on those women who had “an influential position, both socially and professionally,”⁽¹²⁾ to join the movement. Of course, this had been Christabel’s goal for some time, but now a concerted effort was to be made, the results of which were to have dramatic, yet different repercussions in Leicester and Nottingham. Undoubtedly other branches around the country, and especially the industrial north would have also been affected by the implementation of this policy and to suggest otherwise would be to argue that both Leicester and Nottingham were special cases with factors and conditions that affected only them. However, to study any repercussions beyond the East Midlands would be difficult as few studies* of local branches have been carried out and further research within the context of this thesis would fall outside the remit of this work and, as a result, the consequences of the Pankhursts’ policies will only be analysed in the context of the East Midlands.

In Leicester, on the one hand, the result of this quest for women of status and wealth was to revive the older, sectarian aspects of class conflict, while in Nottingham, the membership’s perceived middle-class status singled them out for special attention, as a considerable effort was made by Clement’s Inn to encourage and nurture the branch while it still remained in a precarious position.⁽¹³⁾ Indeed, there was always a danger that, after the first euphoric meetings and commitments to join, many women would fail to sustain the momentum and would leave the organisation. In order to combat these initial, first

* One of the better studies, To Make Their Mark, by David Neville looked at the local WSPU branch in Newcastle but has nothing to say on this matter. The same was true for George Barnsby’s study into the WSPU in the Black Country, entitled, Votes For Women. The Struggle For The Vote In The Black Country, 1900 - 1918.

wave, desertions, Clement's Inn would leave an active member on site to follow up potential recruits. In this respect, Nottingham was no different and Nellie Kenney, sister of Annie Kenney, was posted to the town to consolidate the branch's gains. Further, throughout 1908 and 1909, Mrs Pankhurst and other front-line suffragettes attended over fifteen meetings and demonstrations in Nottingham alone.⁽¹⁴⁾ And although national leaders attended meetings around the East Midlands, this number was never matched in Leicester.



Nellie Kenney.
Source, Alice Hawkins' Scrapbook.

To a large extent, the problem of desertion had not materialised in Leicester, and throughout the branch's early months there had always been a committed pool of reserves working in the boot and shoe factories around the town. As has already been pointed out, these women were active trade union members and had had much experience of participating in local politics, whether through the WCG or the trade union movement. There is much evidence within the local press reports of early meetings to suggest that, at first, many of these women actively saw the WSPU as another form of female trade union and sought to use the organisation to promote trade issues and involved the WSPU in trade disputes, like the strike at Rowsell and Sons, in the summer of 1908, which will be looked at later.

Both Alice Hawkins and Bertha Clark appealed to all working women to come and join them in what they called their "great fight for freedom,"⁽¹⁵⁾ Of course, under the leadership of such women it is hardly surprising that the local WSPU reflected the work they had begun in the Trades' Council and the trade union. They had not yet fully seen themselves as part of a wider organisation that would increasingly have little to do with

working women. Instead, they concentrated on the problems of low wages and the failure of the town council to appoint a woman probation officer. The motion to confront this issue was raised by Evelyn Close, ⁽¹⁶⁾ a Poor Law Guardian who strongly believed that the interests of women and children probationers would be seriously overlooked by the appointment of a male probation officer to oversee their cases. ⁽¹⁷⁾ Without doubt, this was of some importance to them and they felt, long before the Pankhursts' sojourn into the world of the white-slave trade, that women's interests must be safeguarded within the legal process.

As they saw it, much of the female crime that was coming before the magistrates bench was a direct result of women's social inferiority and their economic dependence on men. Moreover, the legislation that would improve working -conditions and advance the social conditions of poor women would only come from women having the vote. Consequently, until that time appeared, women needed to be represented by officials of their own sex who could not only empathise with their problems, but who would also treat them as victims rather than offenders. It was argued with some passion that women were forced into prostitution because of their social condition and their inability to earn either a living wage or be able to keep for themselves what little they earned. ⁽¹⁸⁾

In order to ascertain whether the working-class background was unique, it is important to investigate, wherever possible, the social backgrounds of the membership in other regions, and in Nottingham it is clear that the situation was somewhat different. Although it is difficult to be certain as to the exact number involved due to the secrecy surrounding WSPU members, it is clear from comparing lists of women noted at Liberal, Conservative and even Women's Co-operative Guild meetings in the local press and with those involved in WSPU activities that, from the start, the branch had failed to attract politically experienced women in any quantity. For example, The Primrose League met on a regular basis and their meetings were covered extensively by all the local newspapers. But at no time did any name appear that could be linked with the WSPU. Likewise, and unlike Leicester and Northampton after 1912, many of the women who were to make up the kernel of the Nottingham branch lacked the political experience gleaned at first hand in

the WCG or the WLA. ⁽¹⁹⁾ Again, only one name, Miss Shaw the Honorary Treasurer for the WLA,* appeared in local press reports and surviving membership lists do not suggest any member moved on the WSPU.



Gladice Keevil.

Source, Alice Hawkins' Scrapbook.

Further, neither could the Nottingham branch claim to have encouraged a large number of working women to take up the cudgels of women's suffrage or become pro-active in the campaign. Of course, class is not the only touchstone of radicalism, as indeed, many middle-class women were more militant than working-class ones. However, if it is to be demonstrated that the Leicester branch was different or unique in its social make-up, then the backgrounds and social class of the Nottingham branch become important.

On this point, however, there is a fundamental confusion as to the branch and its social make-up that may never be cleared up. On the one hand it is clear that throughout the period, the union was fronted by around thirty dominant middle-class women, but behind the scenes, the branch, according to Gladice Keevil in July 1909, could boast a membership in the region of 300 to 350, and not all of them were middle-class women. ⁽²⁰⁾ This is not to say that some working-class women were not involved at some level within the branch, but that the group's most active members were predominantly middle-class. This assessment of membership was supported by Helen Watts, when she said,

It will be hoped that two or three at least of the three hundred enthusiastic Nottingham members of the suffragette society will take part in the

* Little is known about Miss Shaw other than her position within the Women's Liberal Association and that she lived at 44 Mansfield Road, Nottingham. This area was at the time regarded as a middle-class district.

demonstration. ⁽²¹⁾

Just who these other “enthusiastic” members were, is now impossible to say as no evidence remains to say exactly who they were, but what is clear is that they were not passionate enough to involve themselves in militant action in London and around the Nottinghamshire area. If they had have done, they would have been recorded either in the local press or in the WSPU newspaper, *Votes For Women*. This organ was more than willing to praise the activities of women who had contributed to the cause, in whatever capacity. Of course, under the leadership of Nellie Kenney, herself a mill-hand from Lancashire, it is not inconceivable that some were working women, unable to spare their time and labour to go on active service to support a campaign with which they might have basically agreed, but for now it is impossible to say. All we can be sure of is that the focus, direction and policy making within the branch was centred around a tight clique of middle-class women with little or no previous understanding of political movements or organisations.

They had no real issue or grievance to sharpen their focus other than the omnipotent “votes for women”. And while this was, no doubt, a worthwhile cause in itself, it lacked, at first, the emotion and the commitment already seen in Leicester. Instead, the women were well-to-do ladies who brought to the cause an almost evangelical flavour tinged with a radical feminism that was all but lost on its working-class audience. While preaching to the poor the need to get involved, they ostracised and alienated potentially active women with their often high-handed attitude to poverty. As Sandra Holton has pointed out, “disillusion with the WSPU among working-class suffragettes around 1908 was increasingly evident at this time.” ⁽²²⁾ On this point, however, it is important to remember that the branch was peopled by women who, if not actually having money, had access to money, like Dr Letitia Fairfield, a doctor at Nottingham’s General Hospital, Miss Burgess, headmistress of a local school and Mrs Elsa Oswald, a prominent member of the Church League. They were not only influential members of the community, but also highly prominent within the local philanthropical societies around Nottingham. Consequently they had had little experience of the effect poverty had on the poor, and had even less idea what to do about it. Further, while they were content to confine their

meetings and involvement to speaking in local halls on lofty ideals that had little chance of compromising their status as “ladies”, their husbands were satisfied to let them participate in the organisation. *

Before this, however, as it has been pointed out, only one or two had been involved to some degree in the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Society and the Women’s Liberal Association, like Miss Shaw, but these organisations too had all the appearance of a social club rather than a political pressure group. They lacked the fire and passion for political debate that was so common in Leicester amongst the women’s political organisations. As one founding member of the NUWSS lamented in 1911,

As one of the original members of Nottingham’s NUWSS, I may say that I notice with some regret the small-minded eagerness with which that society constantly explains that it is ‘lawbiding’, seeking to curry public favour by implied censure of those women who alone have done the work. I left the society some years ago, wearied by stagnation and ineptitude. ⁽²³⁾

Indeed, throughout the branch’s early years there were two significant differences between itself and the national movement. Firstly, the organisation consistently failed to field indigenous speakers at local and national rallies, and the women members seemed to place a curiously strong reliance on men to either speak, or chair their meetings. Of course, before 1912, men had often been part of the national organisation but had restricted their participation to reworked Christian codes of knightly conduct in their role of stewards and bodyguards, ⁽²⁴⁾ non-violent protesters and auxiliaries. ⁽²⁵⁾ Throughout the period it was unusual to find men involved in the proceedings of women’s meetings.

Given that the organisation was to be independent of all male influence and direction, this

* However, despite their slow start and lack of political experience, this was later to change with the outbreak of extreme militancy in 1912. These women, under the guidance of Christabel Pankhurst, found their voice and cared little for male approval.

is one of the most curious factors pertaining to the branch. As David Mitchell pointed out in *Queen Christabel*,⁽²⁶⁾ for many suffragettes, a complete break with men and their authority was at the heart of Christabel's political wisdom although a Men's Political Union for Women's Enfranchisement was formed in 1910, solely as a support organisation for the WSPU. Nevertheless, the Nottingham branch's use of men was still an outstanding major difference between themselves and the wider movement. Support is one thing, but to direct and chair meetings was another. It reflected the tactics of the NUWSS rather than the WSPU. As Mrs Rowe made clear when she addressed the national WSPU in 1907, men's participation within the NUWSS was one of the significant elements in keeping the suffrage organisations apart. There would be no hope of an alliance between the two unions until they had "lost that touching faith in men's intentions"..... and she concluded that, "The Pankhursts have deep political insight in entirely distrusting any body of men."⁽²⁷⁾

However, the experiences of the women in the East Midlands during this early period appears to suggest this form of political apartheid simply did not exist. The importance of men, their experience, organisations and political respectability were too significant to ignore and men like the Reverend Lloyd-Thomas, Mr Cripps, Richard Hickling and Mr Shelley consistently chaired their meetings, attended rallies as a form of unpaid bodyguards and spoke on franchise issues.⁽²⁸⁾ Charles Lambert Rothera was also typical of this male support and was interesting in his own right. Throughout the period from 1907 to 1914, he freely associated himself with both the WSPU and the NUWSS in Nottingham and appeared to see little difference between the two. As Claire Eustance suggests in *Citizens, Scotsmen, 'bairns'*, "this dual allegiance was not entirely unknown and,

such cross-party alliances reflected a tendency among many male supporters at this time not to locate women's suffrage within any one party doctrine.⁽²⁹⁾

Even during the later militant campaign, when the WSPU was virtually driven

underground, he allowed his professional offices at 46 Bridlesmith Gate to be used as a WSPU base.⁽³⁰⁾

As City Coroner to Nottingham, he vehemently opposed force-feeding, and threw his weight behind the militant campaign supporting the actions of the women at every opportunity. He entirely reflected the ideal that it was a man's duty to protect and defend the militant suffragette as the embodiment of spiritual progress and political development was defined in terms "of their historical role in a staunch and unbending resistance to the forces of repression and barbarism."⁽³¹⁾ In one sarcastic letter to the Nottingham press, he more than made his position clear, when he wrote,

I cannot help thinking that the Liberal Government has made a serious blunder over this matter. It is very unsportsmanlike to take umbrage because disappointed women have followed precedents set by men and become rebels against a Government that has first cajoled and then defrauded them, And it is lack of principle to see....(the) passing coercive legislation in a panic instead of legislation which everyone of us, in his heart of hearts, knows can do justice and wishes to see passed.⁽³²⁾

Born in Nottingham in 1850, the eldest son of George Bell Rothera, he was educated at Rugby and University College Nottingham and finally graduated from London University with a BA in 1873. In 1886, he was elected a member of Nottingham's School Board and closely identified himself with the Mechanics' Hall Institute and the Temperance movement.*

This pattern of male support was not restricted to Nottingham; in Northampton, men both acted as bodyguards and chaired meetings. As late as 1913, when the WSPU had all but severed its ties with male sympathisers, men like Harold Croft, husband of a local member undertook these duties on a regular basis. Despite Christabel's determination to

* He later died in Brighton on 8 November 1941, at the ripe old age of ninety-one. Charles Rothera, Obituary File, Nottingham Library, Nottingham.

exclude men from the organisation, this pattern of male support was, in reality, widespread, and throughout the WSPU the rhetoric of militancy only served to establish a new type of femininity that directly appealed to the long-established ideals of chivalrous masculinity.⁽³³⁾ For many men, the treatment meted out by the Government to suffragettes in prison was the embodiment of men's lack of chivalry towards women and it was their lack of chivalry that drove the women further into militancy. As Sandra Holton believes,

For some men, the verbal and physical harassment of suffragette demonstrators and speakers, both militant and constitutional appears to have provided an opportunity for asserting one particular sense of manhood.⁽³⁴⁾

In some ways this was typical of Harold Croft, who was, for over ten years a schoolteacher at a local school, but left to become a full-time organiser of the local ILP. He fully supported the actions of his wife and even bragged at a Trades' Council meeting⁽³⁵⁾ that his wife had thrown a stone through a Home Office window, although, given the fact that she might not have been caught, to date, no evidence of her arrest has been found.

Yet Harold Croft was not typical of Labour Party support; only the most feminist of socialist Labour members attempted to bridge the struggles of the labour movement and the suffrage movement.* In Leicester, for example, the Labour Party, under the leadership of Ramsay MacDonald consistently refused to support the organisation. However, men like Croft were often welcomed as polemicists and apologists on behalf of women militants. They gave a certain prestige to the WSPU when they defended its methods and tactics, or, as in the case of a medical man like Charles Lambert Rothera, added weight to the horrors of Government policy when he consistently attacked the use of forcible feeding as an abuse of power. For these men, the urge to protect the female sex was

* In 1911, the Leicester Suffragettes and the Leicester Clarion Cycle Club attended a socialist camp in Caister -On - Sea, near Great Yarmouth where they freely mixed with ILP members and SDF members. Source, *The Pioneer*, 18 August 1911.

strong and undoubtedly reinforced a tradition that had long prevailed in local politics. They had often assumed the role of escort and protector and this function had now drawn attention to the fundamental questions regarding male behaviour.

The second significant difference between the provincial branches and the national movement was that they were never completely divorced from the other suffrage societies in the way in which Mrs Rowe would have liked. Throughout 1908 and 1909, in both Leicester and Nottingham, there were many examples of fraternisation between the two groups, and despite the obvious and consistent statements issued by the NUWSS that they rejected the militant methods of the WSPU, the allure of many famous names attending meetings and giving speeches proved too difficult to ignore and they would often attend the meetings of the WSPU. As Leah Leneman has noted, this fraternisation was not entirely confined to the East Midlands, as other groups in the North and Wales also mixed. in "A Truly National Movement; The View From Outside London", she wrote,

There is little evidence for any complete local divide between the NUWSS, WFL and the WSPU at any stage... In spite of formal pronouncements by leaders many women from different organisations supported a wide range of militant activity and worked closely together at a local level over various issues. ⁽³⁶⁾

Nor were the two organisations too fussy as to the new recruits who would join, as Helen Watts later confirmed in a letter to potential recruits,

There are two flourishing organisations in Nottingham promoting interests in this direction (votes for women), namely the WSPU and the NUWSS. Either of which would welcome inquiries; and I would gladly direct you to the proper source of information. ⁽³⁷⁾

What was more important was that women, from all social backgrounds got involved.

However, as it has already been pointed out, possibly because of their socio-economic make-up, Clement's Inn was quick to see the potential of the Nottingham branch and appointed Nellie Kenney as local organiser in December 1907 above any of the local women, although Miss Burgess, a local headmistress was appointed to act as branch secretary. Nellie Kenney's appointment, so early in the branch's life reflected not only the political inexperience of the local women, but also their relative unimportance. In Leicester, by way of comparison, the local WSPU had to wait until October 1909 before the issue of an organising officer was resolved, and even then there still remained problems. Almost from the start, therefore, it might well be argued that the Nottingham WSPU conformed directly to the stereotypical image that the Pankhursts wanted. From its inception it was controlled and directed by predominantly middle-class women and therefore, not only best able to finance and support a professional organiser, (each branch had to pay the wages of such women) but also the membership was able to contribute more generously to the "war chest" in London than their sisters to the south. ⁽³⁸⁾

However, unlike Leicester, the branch had no clear-cut policies or political goals regarding the local situation. At no point during 1908 and 1909 did the Nottingham WSPU involve itself with local politics other than to make a limited effort, in tandem with Alice Hawkins in Leicester, to raise money for working women to attend a demonstration in London in June 1908. ⁽³⁹⁾ But in direct contrast to Alice Hawkins and her efforts to promote the WSPU as an extension of the trade union movement, the Nottingham women refused to involve themselves in local strikes or issues that affected many of the local women. Even local by-elections failed to rouse them, as did the formation of the Nottingham Women's Organisation in March 1912 to advise women on the workings of the Insurance Act and what it meant to them. Unfortunately, it is impossible to understand why they took little interest in the political issues of the day, as no evidence remains of their own political motives, but the lack of motivation might be traced to other factors.

One such reason might well be to do with the lacklustre direction of the leadership, or to be more accurate, the inner circle of active members. Despite the often energetic dominance by Nellie Kenney, the branch had, in the main, the broad ideas of the

Women's Social and Political Union, but its radicalism was not gained by first-hand experience of sexual repression or a derogatory inequality experienced in the factories and sweatshops around Nottingham. In Leicester, on the other hand, Alice Hawkins and Bertha Clark had lived and worked amongst the poor, and had acquired real insights into the problems and concerns of the poor and repressed. Instead, the Nottingham members like Helen Watts, and her friend, Miss Burgess, despite the best will in the world, had no real idea of the extent of the problem, or more importantly, the solution. To be fair, the problems of the poor have dogged social scientists throughout the twentieth century and many solutions have been put forward and rejected. But at least some of the women within the WSPU with ILP backgrounds were attempting to change society, and solutions were being debated at length. On this point, it is clear that there were important differences between the women of Nottingham and Leicester. Socialism had given the women of Leicester a framework in which they could make real choices within their lives.

However, this does not mean to say that a woman had to be working-class before she could feel unworthy or repressed. Inequity affected all women at this time, but because their inequality was not measured in terms of low wages and appalling poverty, it appeared to lack the urgency of the Leicester campaign. Provided these middle-class women remained within the accepted behaviour for ladies during this period, they had the time and the freedom to make their protest in a more subdued and philanthropic way. As Helen Watts later confessed, much of what she knew of the world had been gleaned from local press reports. A quick glance at these reports demonstrates that this was little indeed. Neither the *Nottingham Guardian* nor the *Daily Post* concerned themselves with poverty and its causes. Instead, they took the prevalent view that all poverty and unemployment were down to the idleness of the individual. As Sidney and Beatrice Webb affirmed in *The Prevention Of Destitution* in 1911,⁽⁴⁰⁾

It is so difficult for those who do not belong to the wage-earning class to realise the position of the household dependent on weekly wages...(this evil) is not any abstract, 'state of the labour market'.⁽⁴¹⁾

Instead, the Webbs took the view that capitalism was nothing less than an exploitative system and condemned the inequality it created. Thus the WSPU was something of an eye-opener for many young women and when Helen Watts wrote of her early years with the WSPU she confirmed that it had been

A time of new impressions and wider ideas. We have learnt a deeper sympathy with those whose lives have been harder and poorer than our own. ⁽⁴²⁾

In recognising this gulf between the classes she was speaking not only for herself, but also on behalf of most of her generation and social background.

Although it was to take the Nottingham WSPU several years, and ultimately a change of leadership, to acquire a comparable sense of direction, the shifting mood and ethos of the branch began around the middle of 1908, was primarily implemented by the triumvirate in London. Throughout 1908 and 1909 many national leaders arrived in the East Midlands to instruct and inform the local members. To this end meetings were organised and held throughout the summer months. In Nottingham, the conventions began with a huge "At Home" in the Victoria Station Hotel in April 1908. This was a large affair with over four hundred and fifty women in attendance, and it attracted many women from the NUWSS and the WLA. Charismatic as ever, Christabel Pankhurst held her audience spell-bound and enchanted many women in the non-militant organisations. ⁽⁴³⁾

However, this familiarity was not destined to last and, as militancy and the Pankhursts' control of the WSPU increased, many women in both Nottingham and Leicester were forced to make a choice between the NUWSS or the WSPU, with disastrous consequences. Instead of forming a united cartel against the Liberal government, women were rendered less effective by being ideologically divided amongst themselves. Their moral aspirations and the methods by which social and economic reform might be affected, although having a common influence on many of these women, ultimately denied them the part that co-operation between the groups might have played within the

history of female emancipation. Instead, their divisions brought into sharp relief the affirmation of personal responsibility and solidarity within their own groups. However, despite the fact that the militants were constantly influencing the constitutionalists, the non-militants continued to win the propaganda war and recruited many women who would not have otherwise joined. For, in reality, the leadership of the NUWSS and other non-militant groups could not maintain their positions if their aims and methods did not correspond at least approximately to that of the wider membership.

By studying the records and newspaper reports of the local NUWSS, ⁽⁴⁴⁾ it appeared that the WSPU were the losers in this competition for members, as many of the women in attendance at the April meeting remained with, or rejoined, the non-militant faction. In an attempt to offset this potential loss, Emmeline Pankhurst paid a flying visit to Nottingham on her way home from Dundee two months later, and before an equally big audience in the Mechanics' Hall attempted to justify their militant tactics. Interestingly enough, the Reverend Lloyd-Thomas chaired the meeting and told the assembled body that as they

had done no harm to people or property, why should they be treated by men as lawless criminals, undeserving of either justice or mercy. ⁽⁴⁵⁾

In Leicester, on the other hand, the forces of change implemented by the triumvirate took rather longer to materialise and possibly were not evident until the second part of 1909, when Laura Ainsworth arrived in Leicester to take control. Consequently, for much of this period, Alice Hawkins and Bertha Clark were relatively free to pursue their own goals and policies, which, inevitably meant trying to recruit and mobilise working women in large numbers. As a result, almost from the start, and despite the often sharing of platforms around the town, the women from the different societies were never socially or ideologically similar and, in effect, were never in direct competition with each other for new members. Almost in direct contrast to Nottingham, the Leicester NUWSS was predominantly middle-class, and never really viewed the local WSPU other than as an irritant which clouded the issues by staging media stunts. For them, the notoriety the WSPU caused acted as a diversion from the main issue. Completely taking the non-

militant line, the editorial in the *Leicester Mercury* summed up the mood and feelings of the NUWSS when it wrote,

Mr MacDonald was again subjected to suffragette interruptions...the interrupters thus doing damage to the very cause they are presumably desirous of serving. It is little use attempting arguments with these ladies... otherwise it might be pointed out to them that conversions are not made to women's suffrage with the methods of the WSPU..... Militancy will never secure the franchise. What it does is to strengthen the hands of those who contend that women's suffrage would be a blunder. ⁽⁴⁶⁾

II

On a national level, both Leicester and Nottingham were encouraged to join the protests and demonstrations in London and to assimilate themselves into the wider organisation as fast as they could. This absorption into the wider organisation commenced almost as soon as 1908 began, and was in direct response to Asquith and Balfour's challenge to the WSPU to demonstrate that the majority of women were in favour of the vote. Leaving aside for the moment the decision to exclude, wherever possible, working women, and the alienation of the non-militants, the WSPU leadership in London sought to field as many of their members as possible in London demonstrations. To this end, national and local leaders undertook long and gruelling lecture tours to try and recruit more women into the movement. In Nottingham and Leicester, mainly through the efforts of Nellie Kenney and Alice Hawkins, attempts were made to push the message into the small market-towns and villages within the East Midlands. As Alice Day, a Nottingham member wrote,

Now is the time for the great mass of English women to simultaneously rise to the climax..... We Midland women must do our share. We ought to be able to raise a strong force in Nottingham to go and support, in person, the band of noble women who have borne the dust and heat of battle. ⁽⁴⁷⁾

Within the two towns themselves, the Liberals kept up the pressure on the WSPU to show a popular will, and to this end the Government's message was again reinforced in Leicester, at a National Liberal Federation meeting held at the Temperance Hall, when Sir Maurice Levy MP said that he hoped that the Federation would not accept any resolution approving the principle of women's suffrage until the majority of the electors had expressed themselves in favour of it. He said that the proceedings of a certain body of women who had shown themselves so bitterly hostile to the present Government were outright "scandalous."⁽⁴⁸⁾ It was as a direct consequence of this type of criticism that Christabel Pankhurst began not only to mobilise the suffragette movement, but also to demonstrate the existence of widespread support through the use of mass meetings around the country. She later wrote that,

The event of the year was our Albert Hall meeting. The first women's suffrage meeting ever held there and the largest indoor meeting for votes for women.⁽⁴⁹⁾

In the East Midlands, preparations for the meeting were hastily arranged,⁽⁵⁰⁾ and Leicester, Loughborough and Nottingham sent women to the Albert Hall meeting on the 19 March. This large meeting, numbering around 10,000 women, had a profound effect on the women from the provinces; indeed, Alice Hawkins kept a newspaper account of this meeting for the rest of her life.⁽⁵¹⁾ Nevertheless, while some of the working women of Leicester had previously experienced the thrill and euphoria of a major rally, the Albert Hall rally began to bond the regional members together into a tighter, close-knit group. Excellent stage-management around Mrs Pankhurst's empty chair provoked impulsive offers of money as hundreds of promise cards were sent up to the platform as the excitement mounted. Mrs Pankhurst was not expected to appear on the platform, due to her prison sentence, but during the day Herbert Gladstone ordered her release and she arrived at the Albert Hall rather late. At first, everybody believed she was still in prison, and when, at the last moment, Christabel Pankhurst announced that her mother had been released from prison that afternoon, the effect was astounding and everyone gasped as

Mrs Pankhurst climbed the steps of the stage at the height of the applause.⁽⁵²⁾

Without doubt, not only did these meetings give heart to the older, battle-scarred veterans of the assaults on Parliament, but they also gave the younger, more impressionable women a source of strength and confidence. In Leicester and Nottingham, young middle-class women, like Isobel Logan, the daughter of the Liberal MP for Market Harborough, and Helen Watts, the daughter of a Church of England vicar, coming into the organisation, began to feel their way and, greatly inspired by other London militants, volunteered for danger duty. In many ways, of course, this acceptance of danger and the likelihood of arrest and imprisonment was a big step for them. Unsure of what to expect, and despite an almost unbreakable cheeriness, the rigours of prison life shocked most of them to the core.⁽⁵³⁾ To some extent, Alice Hawkins had felt this horror during her first prison sentence in February 1907, and although, at the age of forty-four and not in the best physical health, she was less well equipped to deal with the situation, she appeared to hold up better than some of the younger women following her.

The consequences, however, of such a shock had a greater effect on these young women and produced a more violent radicalism than could have been anticipated by the Liberal Government. The Government's initial aim had been to teach these young women a lesson and many within the cabinet genuinely believed that delicate young women could not, or would not, put up with the shame and degradation of prison life. Yet, not only could some of these women endure the deprivation of incarceration, thrown into cells with common offenders, prostitutes and thieves, but also the harsh realities of prison life made meek and mild women of all social groups into valiant champions of an oppressed sex, with a deep mistrust of all men and male organisations. Indeed, this anger was to surface more obviously in Nottingham after 1912, when the Nottingham WSPU undertook a campaign against men and their institutions. As David Mitchell eloquently pointed out, Mrs Pankhurst led her cohorts into a dark Dickensian world of drab slums, poverty and martial violence, where nothing was more calculated to rouse militancy against a man's world.⁽⁵⁴⁾



The Hyde Park Procession. The Leicester banner, the third from the right, can just be made out. Source, Leicestershire Records Office.

Following the impressive Albert Hall meeting in the early part of the year, the WSPU announced that the Union would hold a mass meeting within Hyde Park on 21 June. This was to be their magnum opus and the greatest franchise demonstration in London since the 1860s. At its height, thirty special trains were run from seventy different towns to bring in thousands of women from the four corners of the country. It was to be known as “Women’s Sunday” and throughout the day, eighty women speakers, including Alice Hawkins, would hold meetings on twenty platforms. Without doubt, the Hyde Park rally was to be the provincial women’s finest moment, eclipsing that of the Albert Hall meeting. Not only did they attend one of the largest open-air meetings for women’s suffrage (the *Times* estimated that between 250,000 and 500,000 people attended) ⁽⁵⁵⁾ but later, a jubilant Christabel Pankhurst claimed that the demonstration was the largest ever gathered together on one spot and at one time in the history of the world. ⁽⁵⁶⁾

Leaving aside for the moment the rhetoric, the event was without doubt huge in every sense of the word, and met in full the demands made by Asquith that the women

demonstrate a popular base for their claim. However, behind the scenes, there had been over four months of almost frantic preparations at Clement's Inn by Mrs Pethick-Lawrence.

In Leicester and Nottingham, the local branches began a series of meetings around the market-towns of their respective counties to try and drum up support for the demonstration. In Leicester, Alice Hawkins, for her part, stood on a wooden crate outside local factory gates, both during the lunch-hour and during the evening,⁽⁵⁷⁾ while in Nottingham, Helen Watts appealed to the middle-class women of Nottingham, through the pages of the *Nottingham Guardian*, to join them in, what she termed, their great fight. In Nottingham, despite the lukewarm attempts to get women to attend the rally in London, there were few real logistical problems in getting the women to the capital. Not only did the membership have the time, they also had the money with which to pay their fare and accommodation.

In Leicester, however, the problems for working women were somewhat more acute. For example, an extra financial burden was undoubtedly placed on these women earning less than 15/- a week by Mrs Pethick-Lawrence's insistence that all members attending the WSPU meeting in Hyde Park in June 1908 had to wear the new costume of purple, white and green. Moreover, the cost of attending such meetings was enormous in terms of train fares, which stood at 6/-, accommodation and time off work. In order to offset the cost of travelling to London, in June 1908, Alice Hawkins



Mrs Pethick-Lawrence.
Source, Leicestershire Records Office.

and Nellie Kenney toured the county collecting contributions and donations to help pay train fares. ⁽⁵⁸⁾ As a result, many working women within the local branch must have felt a sense of isolation from mainstream WSPU policy by their inability to purchase the necessary image. By studying the list of names published in the WSPU paper, *Votes For Women*, it was possible to deduce that the processions to London from Leicester not only decreased in size, they increased in middle-class participation. The procession had just seven members attending, Isobel Logan, Jessie Bennett, Ada Billington, Eva Lines, Jane Wyatt, Miss Bowen and Alice Hawkins. ⁽⁵⁹⁾ However, it must be noted that despite the heavy demands of earning a living and running a home, Alice Hawkins managed to attend most of the meetings between 1907 and 1914.

Not only did time and money play a large factor in isolating many of these women, but also many had families that needed looking after. Throughout these years this was a perennial problem and, undoubtedly, played a major part in the extent to which women could play an active role. To some extent, yet in different ways, both Christabel Pankhurst and Alice Hawkins understood the nature of the problem, and while Alice Hawkins sought to help and support these women, Christabel Pankhurst sought to remove them, if not from the organisation completely, then from taking a more active role.

From this time onwards, instructions were passed down to the local unions not to focus their recruitment drives on working women alone, and in order to see this measure was carried out, Gladice Keevil was appointed to oversee both branches. This appointment was carried out from Gladice Keevil's regional office in Birmingham and was one of the eight provincial district offices created at this time. ⁽⁶⁰⁾

Even in Nottingham, and despite the high number of middle-class women already on its books, Nellie Kenney still retained a measure of sympathy for Nottingham's working women, and would have, given half the chance, increased the number of them in the union. Under Christabel Pankhurst's new directive, however, a greater emphasis was to be placed on women of wealth and position. This shift of policy from Clement's Inn was

to have sweeping consequences for the Leicester branch and marked a significant change in the social and economic make-up of its personnel. Under the guidance of Gladice Keevil, the branch, to the horror of some of its members began a concerted effort to recruit women of the required background and influence. One such woman, Miss Isobel Logan, had been a committed Liberal in her own right but had become increasingly dissatisfied with the lack of action by organisations like the Women's Liberal Association, as her resignation letter makes clear,

To my mind the question of women's suffrage is so important and its continued denial so great an injustice to women, that it is impossible for me to belong to an association that does not put the question before others. For the same reason I am sorry that I can no longer resubscribe to your funds. ⁽⁶¹⁾

Clearly what was bad news for the coffers of the WLA proved beneficial to the WSPU for Isobel Logan was a wealthy woman of some local standing and often cut a dashing figure as she attended suffrage meetings in her motor car. ⁽⁶²⁾ Yet this conversion went much deeper than just financial support. Without doubt, close contacts with the working women of the Leicester WSPU had a profound effect on her and soon after joining the WSPU she took employment as a bookbinder. In some ways this might well have been seen as a token gesture by a woman who clearly didn't need to work, but not only had she been converted to socialism and the need for working women to be independent, but also she argued that women should be allowed to enter the labour market on equal terms with men. However, this conversion to socialism was also tempered with a little luxury, and in August she invited Alice Hawkins and the Clarion Cycle Club to attend a picnic in the grounds of her father's house in East Langton. ⁽⁶³⁾

In other respects this drive to recruit middle-class women was more than fruitful, as the branch was also able to recruit a number of women from the teaching profession. One such member was Jane Lavina Wyatt, a young woman who lived and taught in the Belgrave area of the town, and although she was not to become a rebel militant in the

image of others, she was a stalwart member and completely dedicated to the Pankhursts and their cause. Another recruit, Mrs F W Bennett, also epitomised the new breed of middle-class women coming into the movement. She not only managed to hold an "At Home" at the Wyvan Hotel on London Road for Mrs Pankhurst's visit to Leicester, ⁽⁶⁴⁾ but almost from the start her organisational skills and the ability to co-ordinate and chair at scores of local meetings proved to be of immense value to the movement. Indeed, as an outspoken and confident member, she relieved the growing workload of Alice Hawkins and Bertha Clark and while these two continued to address the issues of working women, Mrs Bennett expanded the work and policies of the national WSPU. As a result the branch began to grow more confident as more local women were able and willing to stand on makeshift platforms around the town to speak to crowds that could number several hundred.

In this sense, the London suffragettes' social make-up and ideology should not be seen as exceptional, in that they reconstructed many of the local organisations in their own image. Of course, in Leicester, some local working women survived the initial metamorphosis, like Alice Hawkins and Bertha Clark, but others did not. On this point, it was partly a question of morale. The influx of relatively rich middle-class women denied them a sustained commitment to a movement that, at first, appeared to be an outlet for their own class objectives. Disillusionment then apathy followed the Pankhursts' decision, but more importantly, it was the working-women's inability to associate themselves with a class that failed to understand their problems that alienated, not only existing members, but also a wider potential group of women working in different industries in Leicester. ⁽⁶⁵⁾ Yet, despite the ramifications of this conflict between women workers and the new radical, middle-class suffragette, this was only part of a wider, more general pattern of change.

III

In London, this sea change was financially led, and all the reforms within the provinces were a direct result of this successful policy. Covering the period 1 March 1908 to 28

February 1909, the WSPU's third annual report suggested that in the fiscal year the income of the Union had nearly trebled, bringing its assets to a total of £21,214, compared with £7,564 the previous year.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Further, the number of paid organisers had doubled to keep abreast of the escalating membership. By 1909, there were thirty regional organisers, compared with only fourteen the previous year. The number of paid staff in London increased from eighteen to forty-five, including the staff of *Votes For Women*, and as it has already been pointed out, in the provinces, this growth was translated into a further eleven regional offices being established in towns and cities around the country.

After the Sunday procession in June 1908, some members from the Leicester and Nottingham branches returned home to meet the demands of either working or running a home or even both. However, other members of the Leicester branch, like Isobel Logan, chose to stay in London and await the outcome of a petition sent by Christabel Pankhurst to Asquith informing him that the Union had met his conditions in full. Unfortunately, by 25 June, Clement's Inn received a reply from Asquith's office announcing that he had nothing new to add to his previous statement of 20 May. The response to the Government's procrastination was swift and sure, and the reaction promised a lively introduction into the WSPU for Isobel Logan. On 30 June she assembled in Caxton Hall with the rest of the WSPU who had remained in London to see which way the cabinet would go. However, by the late afternoon, it had become clear that the demonstration had failed to impress upon Asquith the need for female suffrage.

Incensed by this deliberate refusal to act, Mrs Pankhurst hastily drew up a small deputation once again to carry a petition to the House of Commons. Inevitably the outcome was to be the same as all the others and the police turned away the small deputation only to be met by a much larger procession behind it. As the women crowded into Parliament Square, Isobel Logan and some other women attempted to make speeches denouncing the Government's intransigence but were quickly arrested. Despite being defended by Lord Russell, a friend of the family, and claiming to be a political prisoner, she, along with twenty-five others, was fined or sentenced to three months' imprisonment in default of payment. She elected to go to prison and, not only refused to wear a prison

uniform, but also immediately went on hunger strike. However, her protest was short-lived as she was forcibly stripped and redressed in coarse prison uniform and force fed ⁽⁶⁷⁾

Outside and throughout the women's incarceration, emotions were stirred up and the Government's denials of brutality did not entirely disappear behind the rationalisation they offered, and much public sympathy was generated. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, lamented that "their stringent imprisonment..... violates the public conscience." ⁽⁶⁸⁾ Yet, in reality, public support for the WSPU was rapidly disappearing. In the early stage of militancy, many constitutionalists had been impressed by the individual bravery required to flout the law and seek imprisonment. But the increase in militant actions during 1909 - 1910 began to arouse serious concerns within the non-militant camp. According to Sandra Holton, in *Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain*, the adoption of violent tactics led to the NUWSS publically disavowing the WSPU's new direction. They now argued that it was a poor policy that merely annoyed and angered politicians without bringing them to their senses. *

Nor was it just the politicians that were vexed at the increasing violence. In his book, *Separate Spheres*, Brian Harrison traces the rise in anti-suffrage sentiment and believes that there was a real and measurable shift in public opinion away from female suffrage. In 1912, the *Anti-Suffrage Review* published their findings of a poll of 72,301 people.

Table 4.1

Of this total

20,915 were anti suffrage female

11,869 in favour of female suffrage

2,120 were neutral. ⁽⁶⁹⁾

* However, in both Leicester and Nottingham there was evidence that this policy was not entirely supported. For example, in Nottingham, the NUWSS leader, Helena Dowson wrote to the London leadership regretting the public stand against militancy. She told her HQ that many of her local members were militant sympathisers. (Fawcett Library, London Guildhall University, Helena Dowson to Millicent Fawcett, 10 Oct 1909. M500/2/1/284. MPLA.) In Leicester, Mrs Bernard Ellis of the local NUWSS told a gathering of members that many of the WSPU membership were their sisters who were 'sincerely devoted and ready to suffer for the cause they had so deeply at heart'. *Leicester Mercury* 30 March, 1909.

Moreover, he argues that far from the Cat-and-Mouse Act invoking much public sympathy, many members of the public

saw their suffering as self-imposed and their martyrdom as in some sense staged; such critics disliked what Mrs Billington-Greig called the suffragette 'double shuffle' between revolution and injured innocence. ⁽⁷⁰⁾

Violence against women suffragettes was not only prompted by a deeper social concern about the role of women within the family, it also had a direct correlation with militant tactics after 1912 and the Government's refusal to accept the legitimacy of WSPU complaints. In many ways, this view is more than justified as many acts of violence towards women in the East Midlands can be directly traced to acts of militancy. In Leicester and Nottingham attacks on suffragettes increased after 1909 and little support against force-feeding was found. As one "anti" commented in Leicester in 1911,

The suffragettes cannot surely have realised what a solid wall of opinion they have against their demands. The reason given may not always be sound argument, but the solid wall exists all the same. ⁽⁷¹⁾

Throughout this later period there were numerous examples of suffragettes being attacked in the street. Indeed, attacks on women, whether they were suffragettes or not, also increased. As the *Leicester Chronicle* commented in 1913, "Large crowds assembled in the market place looking for suffragettes," and when they were not found, there were many "unwarranted attacks on innocent girls around the market place." ⁽⁷²⁾ As Brian Harrison has made clear, the suffragettes and their supporters have consistently distorted the extent to which the Asquith Government "with its panoply of law enforcement agencies - police, prison warders and....prison doctors operated independently of public opinion." ⁽⁷³⁾ In reality, Asquith's treatment of the suffragettes rested on widespread public support.

However, the rigours and hardship of prison life for a militant suffragette proved too

demanding for Isobel Logan's delicate constitution and she allowed Frederick Pethick - Lawrence to pay her fine just over a week later. * ⁽⁷⁴⁾ Imprisonment had been a terrific shock to her and it made her realise the extent to which some women were willing to go in order to win the vote. And although she vowed never to return to prison for her beliefs, she continued to champion the cause of militancy through to 1914 ⁽⁷⁵⁾ For example, not only was it likely that she supplied the intelligence for the arson attack on the house at Neville Holt, but, at the Leicester Corn Exchange in January 1909, she vigorously defended the need for increasing militancy should votes for women not be granted. She told the assembled audience that the use of militancy was bringing success for the WSPU campaign. However, for the duration of her holiday in 1908, she contented herself with running a summer campaign around Tenby's Castle Square, canvassing locals and visitors alike.

On the strength of the Hyde Park demonstration, it was decided by Clement's Inn to capitalise on its success and promote open-air meetings during what was left of the summer months of 1908. Consequently, in Leicester and Nottingham, WSPU members continued to conduct what was now a tried and tested means of promoting their cause around their respective counties. The biggest of these meetings was arranged for the Nottingham July holiday fortnight. Thirty thousand people turned up to what was known locally as "on the Forest" in Nottingham's racecourse to hear, and perhaps heckle, an all-star line-up of WSPU speakers. Mrs Pankhurst, Christabel Pankhurst, Mrs Pethick-Lawrence, Mrs Drummond, Annie Kenney, Nellie Kenney and Alice Hawkins fought to make themselves heard above a hostile crowd. Practically from the minute Mrs Pankhurst began to speak from Number One platform, she was heckled to the extent that her speech was completely drowned out. Appeals by the Nottingham suffragette, Mrs A Stevenson, were met with howls of derision and calls of "What about Asquith?" Meanwhile, on Number Five platform, Alice Hawkins was no better served, and both Mrs Drummond and herself were attacked by a hostile crowd, and several attempts were made to overturn the platform. Entreaties by both Alice Hawkins and Mrs Drummond were met by such a

* After her prison ordeal she retired to Tenby for a short holiday staying at the Worcester House Hotel.
The Leicester Chronicle, 14 August 1908.

roar that all hopes of calm were abandoned, and when Alice Hawkins was hit in the face by a clod of earth, she retired from the platform, and the fray altogether. ⁽⁷⁶⁾ Clearly, the earlier problems from December 1907 had come back to haunt them and, as Richard Simon, father of one of the Nottingham WSPU members later recalled, "Much of the rushing and attempting to overturn the platforms was done by (a small number of Nottingham) university students." ⁽⁷⁷⁾

Alice Hawkins had, however, by the autumn campaign fully recovered and, while determined efforts were being made to recruit more middle-class women into the suffragette movement, she and Lizzie Willson continued to try and recruit working women into the trade union movement. Indeed a lingering strike at Rowsell and Sons consumed a great deal of Alice Hawkins' time, and when one of the pickets, Elizabeth Smith, was arrested and charged with assault, ⁽⁷⁸⁾ incensed at the injustice, Alice Hawkins organised a series of protest meetings in support of the right to strike and the need to picket. Moreover, the matter was brought up in the Trades' Council, but ultimately, other than condemning the JP little could be done. However, the WSPU had now made many friends within the women's trade union movement. ⁽⁷⁹⁾

All it needed now was to be able to translate this goodwill into positive action, but as the branch's leadership moved further away from its working-class roots, this proved increasingly difficult. In some ways it was a missed opportunity, and when the WSPU further refused to become involved the initiative was lost for good. Only the residue of distaste was left in the mouths of the male trade unions. They had resented this intrusion and believed the women's actions had greatly retarded good relationships between themselves and the Employers Federation. ⁽⁸⁰⁾

By 1909, the movement in Leicester had grown sufficiently for it to begin to branch out and take its message into the surrounding countryside. Still under the all-encompassing umbrella of Gladice Keevil's direction from Birmingham, the message was to be carried far and wide, and in much the same way as the early campaigns of 1908. From the onset of spring, excursions in the manner of the Clarion Cycle Club were planned to visit the

surrounding villages and towns on bicycles to put the message over on village greens and outside factory gates. Consequently, by the end of the year an independent branch of the WSPU had been set up in Loughborough under the guidance of Miss Elsa Gaye. Unfortunately nothing to date is known about these women other than one local suffragette, Miss Corcoran. She was the daughter of a local doctor and often gave advice and lectures to the women on how to speak in public. However this relatively small branch was able to grow and not only was it able to open a shop in Baxter Gate, ⁽⁸¹⁾ but its members often attended processions in London side by side with the Leicester and Nottingham women.

IV

In Nottingham, on the other hand, the branch appeared to suffer from the loss of Nellie Kenney during December 1908. Her work was now done and she was to return to London and continue the fight there. However, her departure created something of a vacuum, for no other organiser was immediately appointed to take her place, but the branch was considered to be far too important to be allowed to drift for long and the regional organiser for the Midlands, Gladice Keevil, was sent to Nottingham to oversee the running of the branch. As has been previously suggested, the quality of leadership was everything in these branches, and Gladice Keevil was more than competent. Despite the fact that she had a wide area under her control, she had much experience in running WSPU affairs. As a result, she was able to inject the degree of stability that the branch required. However, her legacy was more in her personality than her administrative capacity. She had an almost charismatic presence that inspired women to militant acts rather than by direct leadership.

As a result of the departure of Nellie Kenney coupled with the increasing influence of Gladice Keevil, many within the branch had now begun to develop personally and were soon ready to face the trial and tribulations of battle and imprisonment. For Helen Watts, the romantic vision of women in full revolt expressed itself as the martyred suffragette languishing in Holloway prison, and as such, it was only a small step for her to take to



Jane Lavina Wyatt.
Source, Leicestershire Records Office.



Ada Billington.
Source, Leicestershire Records Office.



Eva Lines.
Source, Leicestershire Records Office.

join the legions of women seeking arrest and imprisonment. From what she left in the way of speeches and letters, her conversion to militancy was a long and thoughtful process that took at least two years but when she had made up her mind her actions were dramatic and swift, and she was arrested and imprisoned twice in seven months.

The first imprisonment occurred in February 1909 in London. Signalling her intentions to be arrested on the forthcoming demonstration in the capital to the Nottingham branch secretary, Miss Burgess, she travelled south shortly after the New Year to stay with friends while she waited for Parliament to open in February.⁽⁸²⁾ Later she not only recalled her motives and feelings, she also wrote about her arrest and imprisonment in some detail from the prison cell.

There comes a time in every reform movement when some protest action against the continuance of injustice and consequent inevitable evils becomes a solemn and sacred duty, not to be ignored without shame and degradation of ideals..... I left Caxton Hall with a deputation about a quarter to eight. There was a great crowd outside and almost immediately I and the girl I was walking with were separated from the rest. We made our way as best we could into Victoria Street until walking was quite easy, and we went quickly along till we got near the Houses of Parliament. There the police were waiting for us. I got separated from the other girl and tried to get past the police about six times. At last, I heard a man shout out, 'Let her through' and I was allowed to go quietly on. I tried to walk through the gates and then I found a policeman was at my elbow. Another came up and I was marched between them (to Cannon Row police station.) At the station I found the girl I started out with. She had just arrived. We were the only ones here for some little time, but they are nearly all here now; the room is quite crowded and we shall be let out at 11 o'clock. Mr Pethick-Lawrence has bailed us all out till tomorrow morning and we shall have to present ourselves for trial at Bow Street Police Court at ten. I suppose we shall go off to Holloway about two hours later.⁽⁸³⁾

As she was given a month in prison for obstruction, she cheerfully told the bench that she had every intention of doing the same again at the first opportunity. Interestingly enough, her actions were not without their consequences for her father, who, while declaring at the time he was a supporter of the women's claims, had not committed himself to advocating either the militant or non-militant groups. However, with his daughter's imprisonment, this neutrality was not to last and as the militant campaign intensified he moved over and actively supported the non militant National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in Nottingham.

The second prison sentence occurred later in the year when Helen Watts, Nelly Crocker and Mary Rawson of the Nottingham branch travelled to Leicester to help Alice Hawkins and a few other militants from Clement's Inn to disturb Churchill's forthcoming meeting of the Liberal Association. They had known of this event well in advance and plans were laid that would attempt to catch Churchill off his guard. But since his last visit to Leicester in January 1909, he was only too aware of what to expect from the women of the Midlands, and consequently, all women were barred from the meeting. As the hour of the event approached two suffragettes from London, Margaret Hewitt and Miss Joachim, who was dressed as a cowboy, rode up and down Granby Street and London Road proclaiming "Votes for women" and denouncing Churchill's stance on female suffrage. ⁽⁸⁴⁾



Alfred Hawkins.

Source, Leicestershire Records Office.

Meanwhile, further down Belgrave Road, outside the Palace Theatre, Helen Watts, Mary Rawson, Alice Hawkins, Nelly Crocker, plus two national organisers from Clement's Inn, protested loudly at their exclusion, but as yet with no force. ⁽⁸⁵⁾ For a time it appeared to most of the Liberal officials that the meeting would progress without

interruption. But they had reckoned without Alfred Hawkins, who was standing in the stalls towards the back of the hall. Like his wife, he was a committed socialist and deeply believed in the cause of the WSPU and as a man was able to enter the meeting with impunity. Later, as a result of his militant actions, and with his old friend, Victor Duval, they formed, with the blessing of the Pankhursts, the Men's Political Union of Women's Enfranchisement in 1910.

Judging his moment with care he rounded upon Churchill's call for support with,

Why don't they (the Liberal Government) secure the support of women of the country - How dare you stand on a democratic platform. ⁽⁸⁶⁾

Predictably, he was asked to leave without further trouble and, predictably, he refused. As a result he was rushed by four policemen and half a dozen stewards who bundled him to the door and ejected him from the building. Once he was outside, the protest was all but over, however the women decided to hold their own meeting at "the Old Cross" * further up Belgrave Gate for members of the public that had been unable to get in. Roused by the meeting, and possibly egged on by the watching crowds, the women decided to attempt to regain entry to Churchill's meeting but in the following struggle with waiting police, all seven were arrested, including Alfred Hawkins.

In keeping with WSPU policy all six women elected to go to prison rather than pay the fine imposed. However Alfred elected to pay his fine and return home. This action on his part reflected the hardship and problems working people faced when taking a militant course. The Hawkins family did not have the same financial security as many of their middle-class friends and his wage was important for its upkeep. However, once in prison, all six women immediately asked to see the governor, Mr J Noon, and informed him that they would not submit to prison discipline, or exchange their clothes for prison attire. Strangely enough, although they continued to refuse to work, eat or to wear prison

* According to J Wilshire in a *Short History Of The Site And Construction Of The Leicester Clock Tower*, the Old Cross stood on the site of the Clock Tower. When the site was demolished in 1575, the site retained the name.

clothes, they were not punished by the prison authorities. Indeed, even when Helen Watts broke two of her cell windows, no punishment was forthcoming. As Alice Hawkins said later of the Governor, "He was very nice."⁽⁸⁷⁾

Interestingly enough, although the middle-class, militant suffragette had materialised in Leicester, there were some signs that the older, more conservative, working-class sections of the WSPU still exerted a restricting influence on the group as a whole. Women like Mrs Barnes and Mrs Lowe, wife of a local Labour councillor were deeply reluctant to follow the Pankhursts further down a more militant road.

Dr Pemberton-Peake



Source, Leicestershire
Records Office.

Indeed, when faced with the prospect of assault and arrest at Churchill's second meeting at the Palace Theatre in Belgrave Gate, one member proclaimed that it was hardly worth the candle. Speaking publicly, she mockingly argued that because Leicester's public opinion was slow to arouse itself, "There was a feeling among local members against taking the course which would send them down Welford Road."⁽⁸⁸⁾

Nevertheless, this excursion into prison had an interesting conclusion. Dr Pemberton - Peake, who lived above his practice in Oxford Street,⁽⁸⁹⁾ was also the prison doctor and met the women in his professional capacity. Much impressed by what he saw in prison, both he and his wife became active members of the WSPU, with Mrs Pemberton-Peake taking a major role in the policy and direction of the branch. Her arrival, along with Jane Lavina Wyatt, * Ada Billington and Eva Lines, marked almost a new beginning for the Leicester WSPU. These women had, for a time, belonged to the NUWSS, but found the

* According to a local resident, Mr George Motley of 17 Edgehill Road, Leicester, Jane Lavina Wyatt lived on Gipsy Lane and taught at Harrison Road School.

members too “dowdy” ⁽⁹⁰⁾ for their taste. Indeed, curiously enough, both Eva Lines and Elizabeth Frisby, later to become the first woman Lord Mayor of Leicester, * recalled that the branch began around this time.

Clearly that is not strictly true, but it appears that some form of reorganisation did take place. For example, from the notes taken at a meeting at the Victoria Galleries in Granby Street in October 1909, Mrs Pemberton-Peake informed the branch members that the radical suffragette, Laura Ainsworth had been appointed as new organising secretary. ⁽⁹¹⁾ For some time previously, Alice Hawkins had astutely recognised the limitations of her organisational skills and throughout the early years consistently appealed to Clement’s Inn for a full-time Organising Secretary in order that they could “make great strides” ⁽⁹²⁾ in getting their



Elizabeth Frisby.

Source, *Leicester, Civic, Industrial, Institutional, Social Life, 1927.*

message across. Consequently, when Miss Ainsworth, a dyed-in-the-wool militant, was released from Winson Green prison on 5 October she travelled to Leicester to take control. In some ways she was an important member of the WSPU and as Antonia Raeburn pointed out in *The Militant Suffragettes*, ⁽⁹³⁾ it wasn't until her release that any definite facts about force-feeding became public. Not only did she attempt to sue the Government, the prison governor and the visiting doctor for assault she also helped to circulate a poster depicting the horrors of forcible feeding. In sensationalist detail she wrote,

I was raised into a sitting position and the tube about two foot long was produced. My mouth was prized open with what felt like a steel instrument, and then I felt them feeling for the proper passage. All this

* She was to be indicative of this new breed of young radicals coming into the movement at this time. Although she was undoubtedly middle-class, she was also a committed socialist and worked for eight years as a district visitor in some of the poorest areas of Leicester.

time, I was held down by four or five wardresses. I felt a choking sensation, and what I judged to be a cork gag was placed between my teeth to keep my mouth open.⁽⁹⁴⁾

However, she was only to stay in Leicester for a short time before she moved on to a new position. However these new recruits were to become the more radical, professional militants under the new leadership of Dorothy Pethick, the younger sister of Mrs Pethick-Lawrence. Dorothy Pethick and her companion, Miss Bowker, had arrived in Leicester at the end of a prison sentence for breaking windows in Downing Street and Whitehall.⁽⁹⁵⁾ They had been part of a deputation from Caxton Hall to petition the Prime Minister in late June. Consequently, because of their actions both Dorothy Pethick and Miss Bowker were sent to Holloway prison where they subsequently went on hunger strike and were forcibly fed for the duration of their sentence. The horrors of Dorothy Pethick's experience were later revealed to a meeting in Northampton. In a calculated attempt to raise the militancy within these stout and steadfast women, she told them,

After 53 hours fasting, I was assaulted by six women and three men in operating aprons, who held me in a chair with my hands bound, while I was fed by a nasal tube with a pint of milk and eggs beaten up.⁽⁹⁶⁾

She then declared that the doctors were unnecessarily callous, careless and brutal. After one force-feeding exercise, one remarked that they never tested her heart, to which the other replied, "Oh never mind, I expect that is all right."⁽⁹⁷⁾

After a short recuperation both Dorothy Pethick and Dorothy Bowker arrived in Leicester and took up residence at 11 Severn Street.⁽⁹⁸⁾ Without doubt, the strength and character of this brave, tenacious woman was an important determining factor in the branch's future development. For many adherents within the group, Dorothy Pethick was the catalyst that was to bring them all together and bind them into a fighting group. From now on, all sectarian politics were abandoned in favour of the Pankhursts' extreme militancy. Both middle-and working-class women had found a champion in whom they could not only

believe, but also under whom they could unite, as least for the time being. In the end these women became more willing and financially able to meet the challenge of a Government that had all but declared war on them. They were to become, what Lady Constance Lytton proclaimed at a WSPU meeting in the Temperance Hall in November 1909, "hooligan suffragettes."⁽⁹⁹⁾ *

In other areas too, the WSPU were becoming very adept at tracking and accosting Government ministers around the country. This ability to follow ministers was aptly demonstrated in early 1909 when Winston Churchill was invited to speak at Leicester's Chamber Of Commerce. The local WSPU, under the guidance of Miss Cameron, a "Young Hot Blood"^{**} from Leicester, began a dedicated campaign to waylay Churchill between the railway station and his hotel.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ She appointed local members to watch both the railway station in Great Central Street and The Grand Hotel. But despite extensive plans, Churchill was able to avoid them. Only Bertha Clark came close, when she managed to accost him outside his hotel.

By the end of 1909, the Leicester and Nottingham branches had been radically altered by the Pankhurst family. In Leicester the process of recruiting middle-class women had begun and the branch was slowly being transformed away from its original make-up. In Nottingham, the branch was encouraged and nurtured in a way that Leicester never was, and, indeed, this investment was later to prove worth while, for the Nottingham women, once they had cast off their male support, became more militant than any other group within the East Midlands. However, 1909 also proved to be something of an unstable year for both branches. In Nottingham, the departure of Nellie Kenney in December 1908 threw the branch into an uncertain period.

* This expression was first used by Mrs Pankhurst on her earlier American tour.

** The term Young Hot Bloods refers to an article in the *Daily News* which described the young followers of Mrs Pankhurst as the 'younger more hot-blooded members'. This phrase inspired Mary Home to form an inner circle of women under thirty to carry out acts of militancy which ran the risk of imprisonment. *Daily News*, September 1907.

From the end of the year to July 1909, when Nellie Crocker was appointed to run it, the group was practically leaderless within the town. Of course, Gladice Keevil, the regional organiser based in Birmingham, took over the responsibility for the branch's well-being and spent a lot of her time within the town. Further, she was undoubtedly personally responsible for the development of many local women into militant suffragettes, but due to the distance and a wide area of responsibility, she could not be with the Nottingham women all the time and many within the branch felt that they had been left to drift with the consequence that little recruiting was done during this time.

CHAPTER FOUR

Growth Of The Pankhurst Autocracy And Its Consequence On The Leicester And Nottingham Branches

- (1) Nottingham Evening Post, 1 January 1908. The report noted that the WSPU in the town would engage in active work in the coming year and stated that they were anxious to attend the Women's Parliament in February 1908 in the Caxton Hall in London.
- (2) Mrs Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, The New Crusade, London, Women's Social and Political Union, May 1907, p.7.
- (3) Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement, London, Virago Press, 1977, p. 517.
- (4) Les Gardner, Stepping Stones To Women's Liberty, London, Heinemann, 1984, p. 46.
- (5) Sandra Holton, *Women and the Vote*, Ed June Purvis, Women's History in Britain, 1850 - 1945, London, UCL Press, 1995, p.291.
- (6) Votes For Women, October 1907.
- (7) Letter from Mrs Pankhurst to Sylvia Pankhurst, 22 June 1907. E. S. Pankhurst Papers, International Instituut voor Social Geschiedenis, EFFH Cruqivisweg 31, 0091 AT, Amsterdam.
- (8) Andrew Rosen, Rise Up Women, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p. 88.
- (9) Dame Christabel Pankhurst, Unshackled: The Story of How We Won The Vote, London, Hutchinson, 1958.
- (10) Ibid, p. 66-67.
- (11) The Pioneer, 18 September 1908.
- (12) Quoted in Votes For Women, May 1908, Mrs Pethick-Lawrence, Exeter Hall, 20 May 1908.
- (13) Votes For Women, December 1907.
- (14) Details counted from local press reports.
- (15) The Pioneer, 26 September 1908.

- (16) Little is known about Evelyn Close other than she was a Poor Law Guardian. Her name consistently appeared in local press reports on Poor Law meetings in 1907- 1908.
- (17) The Pioneer, 11 January 1908.
- (18) Ibid.
- (19) By looking at the lists of members within these organisations in various news reports and archives in the records office, women who were to become the Nottingham Suffragettes were simply not there.
- (20) Nottingham Guardian, 1 July 1909.
- (21) Nottingham Daily Express, 27 April 1909.
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- (37) Nottingham Records Office, 3DD893/4, Letter from Helen Watts, Lenton Vicarage, Nottingham, 28 February 1908.
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- (39) Votes For Women, June 1908.
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- (42) Nottingham Records Office, 3DD893/4, Helen Watts, Speech at her Welcome Supper in Morley's Cafe, Nottingham, March 1909.
- (43) Nottingham Guardian, 13 April 1908.
- (44) Nottingham Records Office, DDPP4/3, Minutes of NUWSS, Nottingham, 1909 - 1913.
- (45) Nottingham Guardian, 8 May 1908.
- (46) Leicester Mercury, 25 February 1914.
- (47) Nottingham Guardian, 3 March 1908.

- (48) Leicester Daily Mercury, 20 February 1908.
- (49) Christabel Pankhurst, Unshackled: the Story Of How We Won The Vote, London, Hutchinson, 1959, p. 95.
- (50) Votes For Women, 11 June 1908.
- (51) Alice Hawkins' Scrapbook, Mrs Barrett of Leicester.
- (52) David Mitchell, Queen Christabel, London, MacDonald, 1977, p. 120.
- (53) Both Helen Watts and Isobel Logan expressed shock and horror at the conditions of Holloway Prison. Isobel Logan was bought out because she could not suffer her sentence.
- (54) David Mitchell, Queen Christabel, London, MacDonald, 1977, p.147.
- (55) The Times, 22 June 1908.
- (56) Votes For Women, 25 June 1908.
- (57) The Pioneer, May / June 1908.
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- (64) Manchester Guardian, 10 July 1908.
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- (66) Over a period of time the The Pioneer brought this problem to the fore.
- (67) Votes For Women, June 1908.
- (68) Votes For Women, 20 August 1908.
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- (71) Leicester Mercury, 19 October 1911.
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- (81) Leicester Chronicle, 8 January 1910.
- (82) Nottingham Guardian, 26 February 1909.
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- (89) Kelly's Leicester Directory, 1909.
- (90) Leicestershire County Records Office, SR 48 49 1985. Tape by Annie Lines.
- (91) Leicester Mercury, 12 October 1909.
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- (94) The Times, 7 October 1909.
- (95) Votes For Women, 17 December 1909.
- (96) Northampton Daily Chronicle, 20 January 1913.
- (97) Northampton Daily Chronicle, 20 January 1913.
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Chapter Five

TRUCE, NEW HORIZONS FOR NORTHAMPTON AND THE BRANCHES AND THE EXPANSION OF TRADE UNIONISM IN LEICESTER

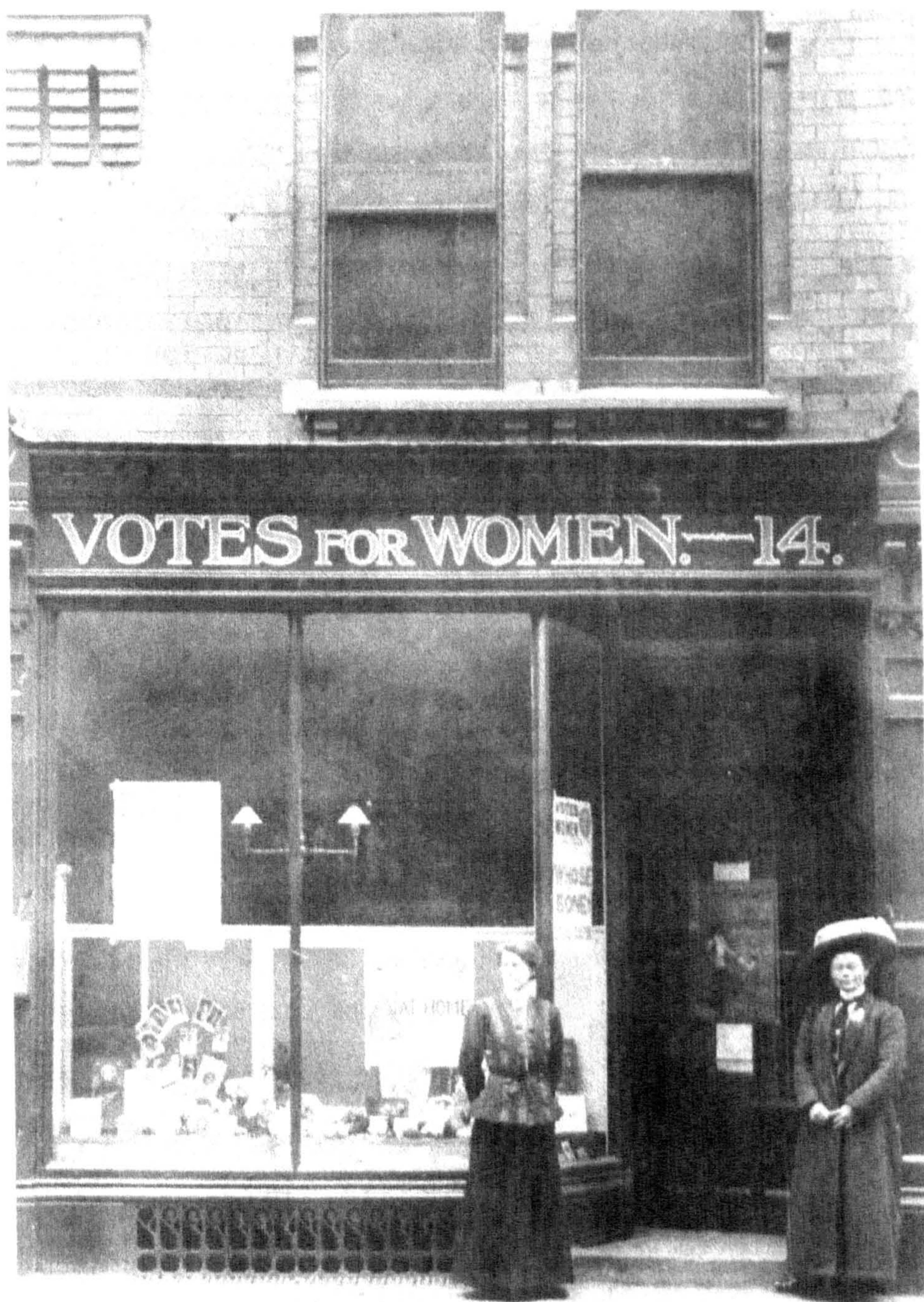
For much of the period during 1910 and 1911, the focus of the WSPU lay not so much on militant actions of the previous few years, but more on conciliation. After the consolidation and agitation of the past few months, both the Nottingham and Leicester branches were in a strong position to continue their campaign of harassment. However, to the dismay of many Young Hot Bloods within the East Midlands, events in London were to overrun the policy and direction of both branches, and members in both towns found themselves reluctantly at peace. ⁽¹⁾ But conciliation was not to surrender, and while the machinations of the leadership committed the WSPU to militant inactivity, the local branches reflected this change in tempo in strikingly different ways. With the arrival of Dorothy Pethick in Leicester at the end of December, ⁽²⁾ the character and make-up of the branch continued to change. The slow metamorphosis that had begun around the middle of 1908 now took on an urgent feel as the influx of young, lower and professional middle-class women appeared to increase.

Again, it is difficult to be precise as to the numbers involved as accurate figures were never recorded, but many new names were coming forward, especially after 1910, at meetings, in demonstrations and subscription lists published in *Votes For Women*. By cross-referencing their names to addresses in local directories, it is possible to identify and classify, with a measure of certainty, their social background as more middle-class than previous members. Although the list is incomplete it is a useful sample, see table below.

Table, 5.1

<u>WSPU Member</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Date of Recruitment</u>
Isobel Logan	The Grange, East Langton	1909
Alice Pemberton-Peake	21 Oxford Street	1910
Mrs Smithies-Taylor	2 Newark Street	1910
Jane Lavina Wyatt	“Fernleigh” Gipsy Lane	1910
Ada Billington	Birstall	1910
Eva Lines	Birstall	1910
Mrs Jessie Bennett	104 Regents Road	1910
Elizabeth Frisby	One Oak, Stoughton Dr	1910
Mrs Swain	130 Regents Road	1910
Mrs Daisy Brightland	“Snydale” Stoneygate Rd	1910

In the main, from 1910 onwards, Dorothy Pethick was more than sympathetic to this class shift and deliberately cultivated a branch of young middle-class women who shared her background and interests and who would also meet the WSPU’s fiscal demands. One such convert, Miss Elizabeth Frisby, ⁹⁾ deeply concerned by what she saw, threw herself whole-heartedly into the WSPU and as a result went to prison on a number of occasions after 1910. As a result, it is possible to argue that what took place after the arrival of Dorothy Pethick was a cultural change brought about by the leaders at Clement’s Inn in London. Yet while this shift of social class amongst the membership does not in itself point to any single, simple explanation of how the branch developed, it goes a long way to explaining why it changed as it did. But it is also important to note that many working women, because of work and family commitments, found it extremely difficult to remain an active member for any length of time. Thus, in a roundabout way the shift between the classes was a consequence of the Union’s own success; and in much the same way as success breeds success, middle-class women with time on their hands flocked to the movement to be part of an organisation that had brought fashion and radicalism to the fore.



The shop in Bowling Green Street Leicester.
Source, Leicester Records Office.

However, the trouble with this somewhat mechanical assessment of the situation is that the changes were often intangible. But undoubtedly, this large influx of new recruits transformed the social and political direction of the Union, and by their example, developed the branch into a more effective group. In fact, through the use of their relative wealth, they were able to furnish another facet to the branch that had been hitherto underplayed. Thanks to higher incomes and, as a consequence, more generous donations to the coffers, the WSPU was able to hold bigger and better public meetings in some of the larger halls around the town. ⁽⁴⁾ For example, in one meeting alone in the Temperance Hall in Leicester *The Suffragette* noted that over £1,500.00 was raised in one night. ⁽⁵⁾ Moreover, the use of this medium more than doubled that of the previous year and this trend continued through to 1914. ⁽⁶⁾ Further, mainly because of the leadership of Dorothy Pethick, the branch became more professional in its outlook. The dynamics of change allowed these women, with their superior education, money and organising abilities, not only to take control of the running of the branch, but also to establish an official shop at number 14 Bowling Green Street, right in the heart of municipal Leicester.

Of course, the local group had used headquarters before, notably a shop in Curzon Street, but they were not as professional as this. Indeed, the shop proved to be something of a success, for in its first year of trading it made almost £117.00 net profit. ⁽⁷⁾ In Nottingham, on the other hand, access to money and the appointment of Nellie Crocker and Gladys Roberts, a young suffragette who had been one of the first hunger-strikers, allowed the branch to establish a shop at 5 Carlton Street much sooner in the summer of 1909. ⁽⁸⁾

In other areas of the campaign, the Leicester branch used its time well and promoted the WSPU message wherever it could. In both Loughborough and Market Harborough, branches were actively encouraged and secured, while Alice Hawkins and others undertook to develop and foster good relationships between the trade union movement and the WSPU. In Nottingham, on the other hand, the branch drifted into lethargic inactivity. ⁽⁹⁾ One reason for this immobility was in the quality of leadership exemplified in Nellie Crocker. At the age of 35, she had taken over the reins of the branch in July

1909,⁽¹⁰⁾ and almost from the start failed to motivate a group of women who were already disinclined to involve themselves with local politics. This is not to say that Nellie Crocker was not a committed suffragette, for indeed, she was, and she certainly stood her ground in deputations in London and was arrested and imprisoned several times. Nor did she fail to rally the branch to oppose the Liberal candidate in the January election of 1910. However, it is clear from the absence of evidence within local newspapers and national archives that she lacked that special leadership quality her cousin, Dorothy Pethick, brought to the Leicester branch and Charlotte Marsh later brought to Nottingham. Indeed, when asked by the Mechanics' Institute Literary and Debating Society to provide a speaker for its meeting, she called in Dorothy Pethick from Leicester to make the biggest impact.⁽¹¹⁾

Instead, Nellie Crocker appears to have allowed the branch to drift without direction or conviction, and throughout 1910 and much of 1911 it failed to use its time well. For example, on several occasions it either ignored or failed to notice the opportunities, within a peaceful context, to forge links with working women or other political organisations within the town, and at no point became involved with strikes and women-worker's grievances, such as over Lloyd George's Insurance Act. Instead the branch appears almost conspicuous by its absence and remained for long periods out of the spotlight. Indeed, during this period little or no evidence of the branch remains. This, of course, could mean two things. Firstly, the evidence never existed and the branch's activities were never recorded, or it could mean that the branch almost ceased to function as an active front-line group and did little that was either newsworthy or recordable. Either way, until other evidence can be found little can be said for the branch at this time other than it emerged later to become one of the most active branches in the region.

As we have seen, it was the unfolding of events in London that drove the momentum within the provinces, and the period of conciliation was no exception. Accepting the advice of the less militant friends of the WSPU,⁽¹²⁾ both Christabel and Mrs Pankhurst announced a halt to the militant campaign and, as a result, 1910 was ushered in under a climate of conciliation as the WSPU leadership called a truce to allow the Government to

consider the issue of votes for women without preconditions or threats. Nevertheless, possibly because of his Government's impending clash with the House of Lords and the certainty of a general election in early 1910, Asquith undoubtedly sought a period of calm in the Government that might neutralise the threat of militancy. With this in mind, he seemed to become increasingly placid towards votes for women and openly supported the moves by Lord Lytton, brother of the suffragette, Lady Constant Lytton and Mr H Brailsford to put together an all-party committee of thirty-seven members to fully consider the whole question of women's suffrage.⁽¹³⁾ Yet in reality Asquith's opposition to votes for women was never more vehement. His objections to women's enfranchisement were based on a belief that the existing social conventions were "natural arrangements"⁽¹⁴⁾ and there were no passing reasons to tamper with them. He announced to a rally of 10,000 men at the Albert Hall on the eve of the General Election,

Nearly two years ago I declared on behalf of the present government that in the event which we then contemplated, of our bringing in a Reform Bill, we should make the insertion of a suffragist amendment an open question for the House of Commons to decide. Through no intention and no fault of ours, that opportunity for raising the matter has been taken away.⁽¹⁵⁾

He probably had other considerations on his mind. As Roger Fulton points out, this speech attempted to indicate that the issue with the House of Lords had cut short the term of the Government and that a pledge taken some time before would hold good in the new House of Commons. As the evidence of later cabinet minutes makes clear, he never really had any intention of allowing votes for women.⁽¹⁶⁾ Therefore this move could be interpreted as nothing more than a cynical attempt to dilute the threat of the militant suffragettes while he resolved his differences with the Lords.

As a result of this proclamation, the Pankhursts appear to have been completely taken in by Asquith's perfidious promise and unilaterally called a truce to allow, as Christabel put it, "The new government to decide its position on votes for women."⁽¹⁷⁾ In the meantime,

the working committee drafted, throughout the spring and early summer, a bill so framed that it would hopefully receive support from MPs of all parties. By and large it was based on the £10 property qualification within the meaning of the Representation of the People's Act of 1884, and had it been passed into law it would have only enfranchised around one million middle-class women. Interestingly enough, even when the Leicester Trades' Council and the ILP refused to support the measure because of its undemocratic nature,⁽¹⁸⁾ the working-class members within the WSPU appeared to approve of the bill without reservations. Indeed, both Alice Hawkins and Bertha Clark defended the Conciliation Bill and put a motion before the Trades' Council asking for their support.⁽¹⁹⁾ Although the Council finally refused the motion, these women had once again demonstrated that they were willing to put WSPU policy before class interests and argued that any measure, however biased towards the middle-class, would be a step in the right direction.

In the meantime, the announcement of the truce by Clement's Inn did not mean that all action against the Liberals would stop, only that peaceful and constitutional methods would be deployed.⁽²⁰⁾ Consequently, the campaign against the Liberals in the first general election of 1910 went ahead as planned as the WSPU attempted to "keep the Liberals out" at every possible chance and in Northampton a double opportunity presented itself. Not only could the WSPU mount a campaign against the Liberal candidate, they could also grasp the nettle and attempt to once again form a local branch.⁽²¹⁾ Indeed, Northampton had always remained elusive, and despite early attempts during 1908 * nothing had been established. However, on this occasion both Leicester and Nottingham sent delegates in an attempt to establish a Northampton branch. Consequently, at the beginning of 1910, Miss Burgess from Nottingham and Dorothy Pethick from Leicester, with the help of a local woman, Mrs Sabins Branch** of Abington Park, Northampton,

* Two suffragettes, a Miss Lambert and Miss Sidley attempted to organise a meeting in Northampton for Emmeline Pankhurst to come and talk, but they were badly hustled and beaten. Miss Sidley received a nasty blow on the face from a missile thrown from the crowd. The mood had deteriorated to such an extent that they had to seek police protection to escape. Northampton Guardian, 12 March 1908.

** There were two Mrs Branch's in the Northampton WSPU and it's unknown if they were related. The other one, Mrs E Branch, was aged around 40 and was married to Herbert Branch who owned a small boot and shoe factory in Henry street. She became the group's Organising Secretary and had previously been an officer in the Women's Liberal Association. They lived at Hill House, Kingsthorpe.

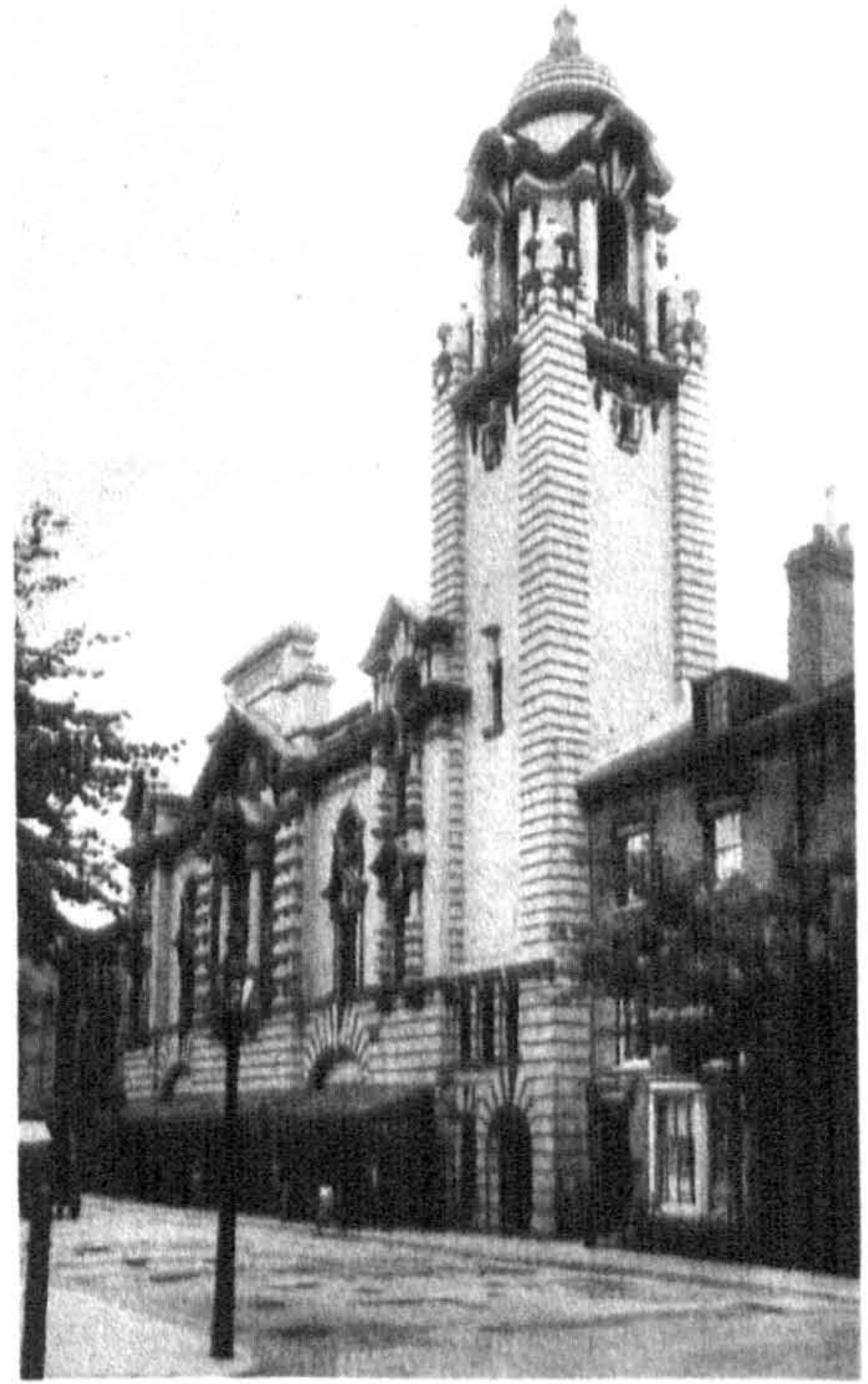
arrived in Northampton, set up a temporary HQ at 13 Bridge Street and began a concerted campaign to interest all reluctant local women. ⁽²²⁾

Adopting their tried and tested methods of open-air meetings around the market-place and factory gates, these women began their campaign on 4 January, but were met by a wall of hostility that threatened to spill over into violence. Mirroring the events of July 1909, when Nellie Crocker and Georgina Brackenbury challenged the local youths to a stand-up fist fight around the fountain, ⁽²³⁾ the speakers were pelted with missiles and prevented from speaking. However, some stirrings of interest were made amongst local women, and when Christabel Pankhurst arrived to speak at the Town Hall the following Saturday, the meeting was sold out. However, she was unable to attend the meeting due to the death of her younger brother. Instead, Mrs Pethick-Lawrence took her place on the rostrum. ⁽²⁴⁾ On this point it might be worth speculating that had she been able to attend, and given her charismatic charm, a Northampton branch might well have been established a good twelve months before it finally was. Indeed, the mood and climate of the WSPU campaign at that time very much suited the Liberal temperaments of many of the women who would later form the branch. But instead, the meetings and debates focused at working women, for the most part, went unheeded. As one suffragette, Miss Evans, lamented after speaking at the gates of Messrs Sears one lunch time, "Very few working women appeared interested in my lecture." ⁽²⁵⁾

It is extremely difficult to understand the reasons for this apathy, but social and economic disparity certainly played its part. Leaving aside the later involvement of the boot and shoe trade union in campaigning for higher female wages in 1911, according to Don Stanton, a member of the Arbitration Board around 1903, Northampton paid the lowest female wages, while the cost of living was 10% higher than in other comparable places. ⁽²⁶⁾ But, without doubt, inroads were being made, and much of the work done at this time was to hold the WSPU in good stead when they returned for a third campaign at the end of 1911. Unfortunately, Elsie Miller, possibly on the advice of Alice Hawkins and Lizzie Willson who had spent a great deal of time promoting their new union in the area, focused on the working women in Thrapston and Kettering. But due to indifference within the local

workforce the promotion fared badly and valuable time was lost. Nevertheless, once the switch to Northampton was made a branch was finally established around a core of Liberal, middle-class women.

In Nottingham, the branch faced both the general election and the thought of conciliation with quiet determination and undertook to fight the local Liberal candidate, Sir Henry Cotton, at every possible turn. Although he was one of the few members of the House who actively supported female suffrage, and often had the courage of his own opinions, he was a Liberal and, as such, was to be opposed.



The Albert Hall, Nottingham in 1907.
Source, Private Postcard.

As a consequence, from 1 January, with the aid of a newly acquired motor car, ⁽²⁷⁾ the Nottingham WSPU undertook a considerable number of street-corner and factory meetings to try and undermine his large working-class support. Amply aided by offers of financial support, the Nottingham branch, according to the *Nottingham Daily Express*, ⁽²⁸⁾ was also able to secure large venues for visiting dignitaries, like Mrs Pankhurst who spoke at Nottingham's Albert Hall on 12 January and Miss Douglas-Smith and Lady Lytton who spoke in the Queen's Hall two days later. Once again, the financial importance of Nottingham was demonstrated by the quantity and quality of visiting WSPU leaders. However, despite this support, the following month Sir Walter Foster retired from his Ilkeston seat and Colonel Seeby, who had just lost his Liverpool seat, was given the constituency to fight. Amid rumours that pressure had been brought to bear on Sir Walter Foster to retire in favour of Seeby, the WSPU attempted to organise resistance to his electoral challenge. Much like Sir Henry Cotton in Nottingham, Colonel Seeby was, by and large, committed to women's suffrage, and had put women's suffrage

in his speeches, but Mrs Pankhurst rejected his call for support, and in a WSPU meeting in the Circus Street Hall told the local members that,

He actually thinks that he will turn us off his tracks by fair words. Not a bit of it. The only way he can satisfy us is by telling us that as a member of the Government, if he is returned, he is going to make women's suffrage a test question within the Cabinet. ⁽²⁹⁾

In Leicester, for reasons that are still unclear, during the January election, the local union's electioneering focused mainly on the seat of Sir Maurice Levy in the small market-town of Loughborough. Some of the newer, younger members would cycle over to Loughborough, dressed in their party's colours to help the newly formed Loughborough branch in their shop at 68 Baxter Gate ⁽³⁰⁾ distribute anti-Liberal literature. On the occasion of Mrs Pankhurst's visit to the town, Bertha Clark recalled her moment of finding the new shop,

Approaching Loughborough, my badge and the Union colours of green, white and purple, drew salutes from smiling strangers - a pleasantly significant tribute to the work of Miss Pethick and Miss Elsa Gaye. There was no possibility of riding unawares past the shop in Baxter Gate - The crowd around the window proclaimed its whereabouts. ⁽³¹⁾

Unfortunately, the impact on the local population is hard to determine, but after damaging reports of WSPU activity over the previous months, the reception they appeared to receive was harsh to say the least. On one typical occasion, a meeting conducted in the marketplace nearly ended in disaster when a hostile crowd pelted Dorothy Pethick and Elsa Gaye with orange-peel and eggs. As if that wasn't bad enough, the dray on which they were standing began to shift and move around, until one of its wheels locked and they were unceremoniously thrown to the ground. Finally, unable to carry on, the speakers were escorted from the crowd by a cordon of police. ⁽³²⁾ Sir Maurice Levy

retained his seat, but by a significantly reduced majority. From this point of view, it might well be argued that the work done by the local WSPU was of some consequence. Their meetings and persuasive arguments might have influenced some sympathetic male Liberal voters to vote in another direction. Indeed, the suffragettes did, at this time, have wide support amongst the electors and many were more than supportive of their cause. But in reality, the degree to which the suffragettes were responsible for reduced majorities in by-elections is hard to calculate. The extent to which people were influenced by the campaign can never be fully known or measured. Of course, the WSPU believed that the losses sustained by Asquith's Government reflected their efforts; as one West Country member, Mrs Blathwayt, noted in her diary on 24 January 1910, "The elections are going against the Liberals and their sins have come home to them one after another."⁽³³⁾

II

However, although the Government's share of the seats was reduced by a hundred and two, to a total of only two hundred and seventy-three and the balance of power was now held by eighty-two Irish National and forty Labour members,⁽³⁴⁾ clearly other factors were at work. In part, it was a consequence of Asquith's declining popularity, and a shift by working-class men towards the ILP. Yet, however real or imagined they were, the claims of the WSPU could not be overlooked by a Government that was hemmed in on all sides; and it was therefore only natural that Asquith had every reason to fear another outbreak of suffragette militancy. Indeed, although the Conciliation Committee had been set up at the beginning of 1910, little had been done by the Government to introduce it further, and on this point Antonia Raeburn suggests that "By the beginning of May, hopes of it being given a hearing were beginning to fade."⁽³⁵⁾ Just when the situation seemed to have reached a complete impasse, a national crisis occurred that would change everything. On 7 May it was announced that King Edward VII had died.

According to Roy Jenkins in *Mr Balfour's Poodle*, the death of the King ushered in a period of political procrastination as Asquith attempted to overcome the political inexperience of the new monarch. Fearful that any delay in the Conciliation Bill might

lead to further outbreaks of militant action, Asquith allowed Shackleton, the Labour member for Clitheroe, to put the Bill before the House where it was allowed to pass almost unopposed. In a Machiavellian way Asquith and the Cabinet had again cynically used the bill to divert and pacify the WSPU at a delicate time. Completely mollified and ignorant of Asquith's true intentions, the WSPU continued their truce, although by late June it became obvious to all concerned that Asquith was employing delaying tactics. Without doubt, Asquith was determined to kill the Bill before its third reading, and referred the Bill to a committee of the whole House. He had deliberately allowed the Bill to run out of time so that by November, it was clear to all that the Bill was dead in the water.

Paradoxically, the introduction of the truce undoubtedly presented the WSPU with the twin problems of how to maintain interest and motivate their members in a period of relative calm. Christabel Pankhurst quite quickly realised, with that intuitive insight that she sometimes possessed, that much had to be done to sustain and continue the high level of motivation within the rank and file. To this end, throughout the pages of *Votes For Women*, Christabel attempted to motivate and placate discontent within the ranks by a series of editorials that, according to David Mitchell in *Queen Christabel*,⁽³⁶⁾

kept her finger on the political pulse.... and managed to create an impression of suspense and imminent victory.⁽³⁷⁾

In both Leicester and Nottingham, the dangers of losing interest amongst local women was as real as elsewhere and it appears that much of their organised activity dropped off, indeed, more so in Nottingham than Leicester.⁽³⁸⁾ Of course, as it has already been suggested, it may well have been that local newspapers no longer considered their meetings and rallies as newsworthy, but the few scattered reports that do exist suggest that there was a real decline in activity. Consequently, the London marches and parades provided a great relief and undoubtedly helped to keep members on board. In Leicester, under the direction of Dorothy Pethick and Mrs Bennett, preparations were well under way by the time the first Coronation march was planned on 18 June 1910.⁽³⁹⁾ After the

drabness of the state mourning for King Edward, a jovial atmosphere prevailed as the Leicester and Loughborough women marched with over 10,000 women and forty bands from Blackfriars Bridge to the Albert Hall. Thus, by nine o'clock the long file reached the Albert Hall. ⁽⁴⁰⁾ By the end of the day the WSPU had raised over £5,000. As if this was not enough, just over a month later both the Leicester and Loughborough women were back in the capital, marching in a large WSPU procession from Addison Road to Hyde Park. At this suffrage rally there were forty platforms and over one hundred and fifty speakers, including both Dorothy Pethick and Alice Hawkins. As the *Daily Express* put it,

Twenty thousand women, with music playing and banners flying, marched in two great processions, converging from East and West, to Hyde Park on Saturday afternoon. It was the third and largest demonstration organised by the suffragettes. ⁽⁴¹⁾

The effects of these meetings were of tremendous benefit to the WSPU. Not only did they attract large crowds to watch the events unfold, they also made a great impact on the public at large. As Fulford reveals,

This pageant of womanhood was a consummate spectacle, reminding all who saw it not only of the achievements of women, but of their gradual emergence from the tribulations in Victorian times. ⁽⁴²⁾

Without doubt, it was from such occasions that the WSPU could be credited with bringing to the suffrage question a prominence that was new and fortifying to militants and non-militants alike. Even after the pageantry of these occasions the Leicester branch continued to use its time well and Dorothy Pethick, for her part, continued to push the message far and wide over the summer months. Taking to their bicycles on Sunday mornings they conducted open-air meetings in Syston, Shepshed, Castle Donnington, Kibworth and Melton Mowbray. ⁽⁴³⁾

By November, when it had become clear to Mrs Pankhurst and the other leaders at Clement's Inn that in effect the Conciliation Bill was doomed, they organised what was for them a typical response. All over the country, local branches received the call to arms they had all been expecting. Indeed, all through the long hot summer, Clement's Inn had been preparing for such an eventuality and had collected a list of names that would make up the deputation. Consequently, on Tuesday, 15 November, Dorothy Pethick in Leicester and Nellie Crocker in Nottingham received a telegram from Annie Kenny advising

Deputation to Prime Minister tomorrow instead of 22nd. Collect members whose names were given. They must meet in Caxton Hall London 2.30.
Very Urgent. ⁽⁴⁴⁾

The same day, Dorothy Pethick, Dorothy Bowker, Alice Hawkins, Elizabeth Frisby, Cameron Swain, Mrs Iondies and two others left Leicester ⁽⁴⁵⁾ to join the deputation, each one having volunteered for 'danger duty', while in Nottingham, Miss Hickling, Nellie Crocker, Miss Roberts and Elsie Hall did much the same. ⁽⁴⁶⁾ Unfortunately, the Caxton Hall meeting was postponed until the Friday so the small deputation from the East Midlands had to kick its heels until then. Other volunteers from other areas had also arrived in London and their presence was creating something of a headache for the over-worked staff at Clement's Inn as the organisation contemplated what to do with them. As Jessie Kenney demonstrated when she wrote to Isobel Seymour asking for help,

If you could slip up to the offices tomorrow I shall be glad, as we have telegraphed to a great many people in the provinces... They will need mothering a little if they have to be in London till Friday. ⁽⁴⁷⁾

In the end Alice Hawkins and the others were billeted in Putney.

Three days later, on the Friday, Asquith announced to all concerned much of what they had expected. Since talks with the Lords had broken down, all Government business

would take priority until the dissolution came into effect on 28 November. While he was speaking, the women were waiting in Caxton Hall and when no mention of the Conciliation Bill was made, Mrs Pankhurst rallied her troops of about three hundred women, wearing white satin badges with the legend, "Deputation 1910" on it. She told them that all

other efforts had failed, and they must press forward ready to sacrifice themselves, even unto death if need be in the cause of freedom. ⁽⁴⁸⁾

These proved to be no idle words, as the impending clash with the police, later to become known as Black Friday, proved to be the most bloody and violent yet. The reasons for this are not hard to discover. As David Mitchell has suggested, before Churchill had taken control of police tactics, earlier deputations had been contained with both limited use of force and arrests, but on this occasion, Churchill decided to take a different tactic. Clearly wanting to teach the WSPU a lesson, he drafted in police from the East End who not only had little experience of handling such demonstrations, but also were renowned for their tough approach. Consequently they proceeded to attack the women in both a sexual and violent manner. As David Mitchell implies in *Queen Christabel*,

As the campaign lengthened and tempers shortened, near (and sometimes actual) rape became a hazard of the tussles in Parliament Square. ⁽⁴⁹⁾

During the six hours of close fighting, clothes were ripped and women were violently assaulted. Eventually, one hundred and fifteen women and four men had been arrested, including most of the Leicester and Nottingham delegates. On the following day, the charges against all the women were withdrawn after the prosecutor announced that Churchill, the Home Secretary, decided that "no public advantage would be gained by continuing with the prosecution." ⁽⁵⁰⁾ In fact, Churchill was deeply embarrassed by the treatment dealt out by the police and intended to drop the whole matter with as little fuss as possible. Later, in the House of Commons, he denied that any fresh instructions had been issued to the police. But he indicated that in any future clash "police would make an

arrest as soon as there was any occasion.”⁽⁵¹⁾ As the testimony of Alice Hawkins later suggested, Black Friday provided the WSPU membership with a strong argument against risking personal injury and public degradation in favour of breaking windows. To many women, window-breaking, resulting in immediate arrest, was now considered to be a safer form of militancy.⁽⁵²⁾

Four days after Black Friday, on the 22nd, Asquith again intimated that should his Government still be in office after the next election he would give time for a bill so framed as to admit a free amendment. However, this news was received with gloom and trepidation. In effect, they believed that Asquith had so changed the bill that it would now be so wide that it would have little chance of success. Further to this, Asquith piled insult upon injury when he only pledged further facilities in the next Parliament, not the next session. Incensed by what they had heard the WSPU, still encamped in London in large numbers, once again proceeded to march upon Downing Street to demand a better deal. This time, however, police were waiting to make arrests and at least five Leicester women, Alice Hawkins, Elizabeth Frisby, Dorothy Pethick, Dorothy Bowker and Cameron Swain were again arrested.⁽⁵³⁾ Again, the fighting was every bit as bloody as Black Friday, only this time they implemented the argument of the broken pane. As a letter to Albert Hawkins makes clear, the events of the day were unlike any other that had gone before, Alice Hawkins wrote,

We went in a body, about 300 of us to Downing Street to tell him (Asquith) what we thought about it. Of course, we were met by a large body of police, and I can tell you it was awful. The police were simply horrid, and they banged and fought like a lot of tigers at times. After a large number of arrests they eventually got us out of the street into Whitehall. After about an hour, I was simply done up and made up my mind to do something else..... When a number of women went out to break Cabinet Ministers' windows, I volunteered to lead 12 to Mr Harcourt's house.... It was easier to break windows than have my body broken.⁽⁵⁴⁾

In court the following day, of the one hundred and seventy-seven women arrested, a total of seventy-five were convicted. Within this group Alice Hawkins and Dorothy Pethick were each sentenced to fourteen days imprisonment. In the case of Dorothy Pethick, she complained that although she had been charged with assaulting the police, she had in fact been sentenced for obstruction. When told by the bench that she was to receive fourteen days for obstruction, she bitterly complained, "This sort of thing" she said "is a scandal. I shall go back to Leicester and get more women to revolt." ⁽⁵⁵⁾ It transpired that owing to other circumstances, both women were bought out before their sentences were completed. Consequently, the involvement of the Leicester women in the events around Black Friday amply demonstrated that the WSPU militancy did not preclude or even exclude the involvement of working women as Les Garner later suggested. ⁽⁵⁶⁾

By December, the second General Election for 1910 had been called. But this time the results were more than disappointing for the WSPU. Despite intense campaigning on behalf of Clement's Inn, the position of all the major parties had remained virtually unchanged. Yet in other ways Clement's Inn had much to be optimistic about, as Asquith had promised to make time for the Conciliation Bill through Parliament. This sanguine belief had been nurtured by Austin Birrell, who told a combined deputation of suffragists towards the end of 1910, "It is my own strong opinion that when Parliament meets next year this question will be decided." ⁽⁵⁷⁾ Of course, the Government had much to be concerned about and indeed Asquith never lost sight of the fact that 1911 was to be the Coronation year. Ultimately, it is difficult to prove that Asquith deliberately pursued a policy of tricking the WSPU into a truce in order that he could contain militancy at such a delicate time. ⁽⁵⁸⁾ Yet, to all intents and purposes, this was precisely what he did. Even Nevinston, without the benefit of hindsight, wrote in May of that year, "Lloyd George's statement seems to be a mere trap and snare in a vain hope of securing peace for this year." ⁽⁵⁹⁾

Nevertheless, and despite the reservations felt by others, Clement's Inn believed that all looked well, and in January 1911 Mrs Pankhurst's New Year manifesto speech

optimistically proclaimed that "This might be the wonder year that shall witness the peaceful settlement of the long weary struggle for political freedom for womanhood." ⁽⁶⁰⁾

III

In Leicester, the branch embraced this new development with as much ardour as the national leadership and Alice Hawkins and Lizzie Willson lost no time in making good use of the peace to continue their work as impassioned trade unionists. The extent to which Clement's Inn approved or disapproved of this move is unfathomable, but it must be surmised that there was, at least, a tacit understanding that they could pursue their own goals, otherwise they would run the risk of being expelled from the union. Consequently, to this end in January 1911, both women sought and won a place on the town's Trades' Council. ⁽⁶¹⁾ Thus, while Alfred Hawkins was away in London receiving commendations from the MPU for his part in disturbing a Liberal meeting in Bradford, ⁽⁶²⁾ Alice Hawkins continued to draw attention to the problems faced by thousands of women workers within the town.

These problems were, of course, nothing new, but since 1904 there had been a slow brooding resentment amongst the female workforce within the boot and shoe trade. ⁽⁶³⁾ Although these workers were, on the whole, patient and generally accommodating towards the union, they were finding it increasingly difficult to bring themselves to take a dispassionate and tolerant view of their inferior position within not only the union but also the workplace. In essence, they were much torn and divided as their Labour convictions prompted them to be sympathetic and helpful to the general aims of the trade union. Yet, they were also swayed by other considerations that tended to fracture along sex lines like the reality of lower wages and a perception that they were "getting much less for their subscription than men." ⁽⁶⁴⁾

They were especially hostile to the fact that, when the union had managed to negotiate a fixed wage for all male employers at a time of slack trade, unemployment and shrinking earnings, the union had deliberately excluded women from this deal. ⁽⁶⁵⁾ Of course it can

be well argued that the union was only being pragmatic in the face of strong resistance by employers, but what is more important is that it was seen by female workers as sex discrimination and such high-handed dealings did much to antagonise and radicalise the local women, as only weeks before the union's president had said with some passion,

As women are now becoming well organised there ought to be some minimum wage for adult women as well as adult men.... At the present time, the wages women receive is a scandal and something ought to be done to try and improve their conditions. We ought to try and establish a minimum wage of 20 shillings a week for all adult females. ⁽⁶⁶⁾

Yet despite this poignant plea, so deftly drafted, the women, with some justification, felt betrayed and deserted by their male colleagues. To all intents and purposes, they had run full-tilt into the patriarchal oppression of women based on the tacit assumption that all women were viewed as "ladies" and as such were treated "to expressions of elaborate concern, while permitting them no legal or personal freedoms." ⁽⁶⁷⁾ And while it is true to say that female domesticity was primarily a middle-class value and that it was less strongly entrenched amongst the poor, many working-class men within the trade union movement still clung to the image as a focus to deny women an independent identity which was not entirely defined by their sexual role. Unable, or unwilling to accept women as economic equals, the trade union movement, while not actively suppressing women's claims, quietly denied their grievances and claims. This, of course, was not a completely isolated phenomenon, but militant women touched a raw nerve that could not easily be ignored. The actions of these women attacked the inner citadel of male domination, and by battling for women's emancipation within the workplace they appeared to be denying their very nature as women, a nature that could only really be fulfilled through "sexual passivity, acceptance of male domination and a nurturing motherhood." ⁽⁶⁸⁾

Yet while this might have been a lofty ideal in the minds of most men, the reality was a complete antithesis of what feminists now call "penis envy" and the belief that women

wanted to be men, and while it was true that radical women “had only one model, one image... of a full and free human being, a man,” ⁽⁶⁹⁾ the truth was that many women were being forced into the labour market through necessity. For thousands of women around the East Midlands, there was little alternative but to work or starve. Indeed, the victims of sweated labour were nearly all women and as such it is little wonder that, given the impetus of the feminist movement developing around them, they should seek to improve their appalling pay and conditions. Thus, despite the good intentions of a few enlightened men, the trade union movement was, in reality, fighting a rear-guard action against the women to protect and ensure that men continued dominance over women. But as Helen Watts proclaimed in a speech in Nottingham around 1909,

It is therefore too late to assert that women’s place is in the home... No logical argument can be advanced against the justice of the claims of women for the enfranchisement on the grounds of their vast industrial service to the state. ⁽⁷⁰⁾

Thus in essence, the trade unions had not only utterly failed to consolidate the potentially favourable forces of the women, they also appeared to be completely blind to the dangers of not doing so. For, indeed, their indifference became the most powerful stimulant to what was to become a full-blown sex war within the union in 1910 ⁽⁷¹⁾ when the issue of fixing minimum rates for women was again addressed at the union’s conference. Almost despite a resolution that was passed that bound all female workers to recognise a Board of Arbitration, no real progress was made in either getting recognition of their claims by employers, or getting a fixed rate of pay through union pressure.

This intransigence on behalf of both the national union and the Employers’ Federation pushed the women’s patience to breaking-point and, if almost to add insult to injury, the union raised their membership subscription by a penny per week. Predictably, almost at once, the women strongly objected to the increase and argued that it was grossly unfair for them to pay the same fee as the men but be refused the same services and protection as the men. By now Alice Hawkins and Lizzie Willson realised only too well that a time of

crisis was fast approaching when they would have to make a stand and fight the male indifference within the national and local leadership. In reality, they were facing a two-pronged attack on their position, for in addition to the indifference of their male colleagues, they were up against the vested interests of the union's leadership who not only sought to protect male employment and wages, but also held the widespread belief that women within the industry brought an unstable element to an already fraught industrial relationship with local employers.

Dubbed by her male colleagues in the Labour movement as a radical fire-brand, Lizzie Willson had long been a prominent trade unionist in the NUBSO and supporter of female suffrage, but although largely sympathetic to the WSPU, as far as it is known she never actually joined the organisation. Instead she devoted all her time and energies to the trade union movement and as such, alongside Alice Hawkins, implored women to join the trade union. Indeed, as early as the middle of June 1908, she had attended a NUBSO conference at the Trade Club in Higham Ferrers Road in Rushden to complain that not enough was being done by the national union to help and support female workers in the industry.⁽⁷²⁾ In conjunction with this assault on the high citadels of male trade unionism, both Alice Hawkins and Gladice Keevil undertook a series of meetings at the request of the United Trades' Club in Kettering to try and capitalise upon Lizzie Willson's initiative and drum up support, not only for women's suffrage, but also trade union membership. On this point it is important to note that in Leicester, as well as elsewhere, the two often went hand in hand, and although Bertha Clark acknowledged that the commitment to the movement was not easy for married, working women, the benefits once won would all be worth while. Thus, she implored all who heard her to support not only the WSPU and its campaign for the vote, but also the striking women in Leicester.

Throughout 1911, both Alice Hawkins and Lizzie Willson, because of recent anti-trade union activity by the Employers' Federation, implored the Trades' Council to take action against local firms discriminating against female workers, but to no avail. At every turn the Council rejected joint action to combat what Alice Hawkins had dubbed "those firms that wage war against trade unionism."⁽⁷³⁾ The Trades' Council always deprecated such

disturbances and tried hard to discourage or prevent open conflict. Instead its members complained that they had enough on their plates in trying to control the situation without the interference of militant women. Mr T Richards, President of the NUBSO, lamented that for the first time in the history of the Union, a section had become adherents to the suffrage movement. Alice Hawkins quickly replied that one did not have to be a suffragette to fight for trade union rights,⁽⁷⁴⁾ although she no doubt thought it helped. Instead, she pointed out that they were quite capable of conducting their trade union business without the aid of the WSPU, even if the president could not conduct the business of the national union without the aid of socialism. As a consequence, the women were increasingly isolated at a time when male trade unionism, according to Alan Fox, was becoming more socialist, and the lack of action taken by the Trades' Council only strengthened the hand of the employers to such an extent that many women in the hosiery trade were signing up to the No 3 branch of the NUBSO. However, when pushed by belligerent employers, these women later backed down and to the dismay of Alice Hawkins left the Union.⁽⁷⁵⁾

By 1910 the relationship between the sexes had all but broken down and when a meeting was held between the Union and the Arbitration Board, at which the Union settled for shop statements instead of a uniform agreement to cover all rates, the women rebelled. As Fox later wrote, Lizzie Willson's subsequent vitriolic attack on the then president of the Union, Mr Freak, was "so unrestrained as to shock all but her followers."⁽⁷⁶⁾ In some ways this failure by the union at large to take into account the issues raised by the women signalled the parting of the ways and while Alan Fox lambasted both Lizzie Willson and Alice Hawkins for waging a sex war that distracted the male members from the more serious issues of the day, the whole protracted and bitter contest merely reflected the desperate plight many women were forced to endure. For well over twenty years little in the way of positive gains had been sought on behalf of industrial women workers. Thus the shock of the Union's decision to yet again exclude women from a rate-fixing agreement evoked a quick response from both Lizzie Willson and Alice Hawkins. In direct defiance of the union's instructions they bypassed the Board of Arbitration and called upon the services of Margaret Bondfield to negotiate on their behalf. According to

Sara Boston, in *Women Workers And Trade Union Movement*, like Alice Hawkins, Margaret Bondfield had become a prominent trade unionist and for a while had been attracted to Hyndman's SDF. However, she later rejected its tones of violence and revolution and joined the ILP where she befriended Mrs Margaret MacDonald and Alice Hawkins. However, while the dispute between the Union and the women continued, a potentially more serious problem arose that was to widen the divisions between men and women even further.

The root of the trouble occurred at the Wheatsheaf Co-operative boot and shoe factory in Wigston, Leicester. Once again the employers had changed, perhaps at the insistence of their male employees, the system of payments to the detriment of the women. ⁽⁷⁷⁾ Incensed by their actions and the reluctance of the NUBSO to intervene on their behalf, Lizzie Willson instructed the women to work to a go-slow that consequently put the men on short time. This action not only made the men more hostile to the women's cause, but it also hardened the employers' attitude and the company made a claim on the Guarantee Fund,* asserting that the women workers had violated the terms of settlement between employers and the union. Their claim was, unsurprisingly, successful and the Union was subsequently fined two hundred pounds. ⁽⁷⁸⁾ Since little had been gained by the women and as Margaret Bondfield was still in town, Lizzie Willson again called upon her services to attempt negotiations on her behalf without mentioning it to the Union's council, whom she condemned as being totally unfit to arbitrate on women's issues. This action broke all established procedures and was the straw that broke the camel's back. Unable to condone her actions the NUBSO leadership did the only thing that was possible and attacked her leadership of the women in increasingly bitter terms. ⁽⁷⁹⁾

In retaliation, Lizzie Willson, incensed at the Union's lack of support and open hostility, passed a veiled threat that should the Union again refuse to take positive steps to address the women's grievances, she would form a breakaway union. To make matters worse, this threat was made public when a letter was published in the *Leicester Daily Post*

* The Guarantee Fund was established by the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives in 1893 to cover both the costs and damages of unofficial strikes against Federation members.

signed Portia.^{*} The author, and there is no evidence to prove that it was Lizzie Willson herself, pointed out that,

Considering the very unfair manner in which the women have been treated, there is only one honourable course for them to pursue, and that is to sever their connection with the union and immediately form the National Union of Women Boot and Shoe Operatives.⁽⁸⁰⁾

In turn the Union replied by suspending both Alice Hawkins and Lizzie Willson. To the obvious relief of many men, the women promptly left and as promised, formed their own union.⁽⁸¹⁾ This decision to go it alone opened up a new era of women's trade unionism in Leicester and as the women sought to start their union, women from all over the county flocked to join in large numbers. As Alan Fox somewhat reluctantly concedes, "The extent of the defections indicates that resentment amongst the women was not confined to a few fanatics."⁽⁸²⁾

Although the evidence is somewhat conflicting, the outcome seems to be that the women benefited from this move, and the Independent Union successfully negotiated rates for its members. Indeed, by 1911, the Women's Co-op Guild reported,

We hear with great pleasure that a scale for the Leicester boot and shoe workers is being arranged by the CWS and the trade union. A number of processes are settled and others have been referred to arbitration.⁽⁸³⁾

Further, it also fought for and achieved better conditions for all members, notably increased benefits until the age of fifty instead of forty. In the end, the union proved to be something of a success and survived until the mid thirties when the personalities of both

* Portia. From the Latin *portitor*. According to Marcus Palatus (184 BC) someone who forwards letters, or of an inquisitive woman.

Lizzie Willson and Alice Hawkins were no longer prominent within the "Independent". *

This agitation, seen in its true perspective was undoubtedly linked to a wider pattern of women's revolt during the long hot summer of 1911 that had little to do with the influence of the WSPU, though they undoubtedly made much use of its dynamics and attempted to translate this dissatisfaction into support for votes for women, or at least the Leicester branch most certainly did. Throughout the land, women had been in a state of agitation for some time as they were swept up and carried along with the tide of militancy that had infected much of industry. In the East End of London, women earning from five to ten shillings struck in what was later called the "Bermondsey Rising". As Marian Ramelson points out in *Petticoat Rebellion*,⁽⁸⁴⁾ because of long hours, low pay and compulsory overtime, the women "poured out of the Jam, Pickle, Perambulator and food factories to join the men (especially the London dock workers) in the strikes which were taking place".⁽⁸⁵⁾

In the East Midlands the infectious mood of female militancy infiltrated unorganised women not only in the boot and shoe trade, in Leicester and Northampton, but also the hosiery industry as well. In Nottingham women within the lace industries, for the first time, began to flex their industrial muscles and caught the trade unions by surprise. Indeed, as Barbara Drake poignantly points out in *Women In Trade Unions*,⁽⁸⁶⁾ had the trade unions been involved from the start, the strikes would not have occurred. Yet that is not to say that the unions were far behind, as both the Women's Section of the Boot and Shoe Union and the Women's Trade Union League, under the leadership of Mary MacArthur, sought to take advantage of this upswing in female militancy and steer them towards trade union membership. "A strike of unorganised workers," Mrs MacArthur declared, "should always be utilised to form a trade union amongst them".⁽⁸⁷⁾

Consequently, it was against this back-drop of female militant trade unionism that the Leicester WSPU, as an organisation within the town, attempted to use the industrial

* The Independent National Union of Women's Boot and Shoe Operatives.



The women strikers at T Brown's on Humberstone Road Leicester.
Source, Leicestershire Records Office.

unrest to their own advantage and openly supported the women wherever they could, in the hope that they would become willing converts to the cause. As a result, both the Gillette girls' strike at their Leicester factory in November 1911 and the strike at Thomas Brown's boot and shoe factory on the Humberstone Road towards the end of 1912 attracted Leicester WSPU sympathy. On both occasions, individual members of the suffragettes undertook the responsibility to support and guide the women in their fight. For example, in the strike at Thomas Brown's, where around one hundred and seventeen women and girls walked out in protest at one of their number being dismissed,⁽⁸⁸⁾ Eva Lines, a teacher at Ellis Avenue school, took it upon herself to champion their cause and stood beside them on the picket line.⁽⁸⁹⁾

Although the strike at Thomas Brown's was less dramatic than the "Bermondsey Rising", it was none the less typical of the intervention the WSPU was undertaking in the interest of good relationships. But this interest was certainly not seen in Nottingham or Northampton, where striking women were all but ignored by the suffragettes. Nor was it appreciated by male trade unionists, who saw it as a political gesture rather than a genuine

attempt to help the women. Not that they, themselves were more willing to help, for indeed, they were not. At least twice during 1911 the Leicester Trades' Council refused a request by the WSPU to support the Conciliation Bill. Instead they sought to push married women, at least, out of the factories altogether. As one trade unionist declared,

The mother who is out all day and does not return until 7.30pm has not sufficient time to provide for her husband's dinner..... The mother who stays at home is best, for she has time to cherish her children as a mother ought to do. ⁽⁹⁰⁾

Instead the existence of this elaborate help and the pretence of mutual obligation has to be added to a highly motivated working-class presence within the local WSPU and its rigidly collaborationist ideology and despite the fact that many of the original working-class members had long since left, their legacy remained in form, if not in person. Of course, Alice Hawkins was still one of the prime movers for this support, but much of her dedication and commitment to trade union activity had rubbed off. However, none of this implies for a moment that the new leaders under the stewardship of Dorothy Pethick had reneged on the Pankhursts' line, instead they moved towards unity within the branch and built upon their merged strengths. As a consequence, it neither disintegrated under the pressure, nor did it solidify into a solid group with one will and direction, and in many ways, this was its problem. For without a unity of purpose it later lacked the ability to become, as with Nottingham, more radical and militant after 1912.

Nevertheless, by the end of the summer, the Leicester union had made good use of the truce and had been engaged, since the early spring, in consolidating the WSPU's good standing around the county and beyond. For instance, from late May and early June, the Leicester branch had been making tentative moves towards the southern part of the county and had managed, with the help of Isobel Logan, to form what was, to all intents and purposes, a predominantly middle-class branch in Market Harborough, under the capable leadership of Miss J Jerwood of Little Bowden Rectory. ⁽⁹¹⁾ In tandem with this campaign, the events within the Trades' Council and the formation of the INUWBSO by

Alice Hawkins and Lizzie Willson, opened up wider possibilities. Linked with the WSPU's expansion into Northamptonshire, they began a series of campaigns to recruit the women boot and shoe workers of Northampton, especially around Kettering and Thrapston, into both the WSPU and the INUWBSO. ⁽⁹²⁾ However, the male Northampton branch of the Boot and Shoe Union was quick to act to dispel any unwarranted unrest and, by introducing their intention to seek a minimum wage for all female boot and shoe operatives to the Northampton Employers Federation in January 1912, managed to keep the Northampton women on board. Indeed, the General President, T F Richards, toured the region and claimed that eight hundred and thirteen women had joined the Union within the space of a month. ⁽⁹³⁾ As Norbert Selden points out in *Women In British Trade Unions*, ⁽⁹⁴⁾ "Women outside Leicester remained loyal to the male-dominated union." ⁽⁹⁵⁾ As a result, Alice Hawkins and Lizzie Willson found it almost impossible to recruit women into their breakaway union.

At first, the Leicester WSPU recruitment drive fared much better than those of previous years and was deliberately focused on the Kettering and Thrapston area where Alice Hawkins had identified those most sympathetic to the cause. At first, according to Miss Elsie Miller, the campaign "promised well" ⁽⁹⁶⁾ and by the end of October 1911 a branch was originally formed in Kettering around a few working women in the boot and shoe trade. Unfortunately, within a few weeks, her earlier optimism proved misplaced and the group fizzled out. Without tangible evidence, it is difficult to know precisely why the group disbanded, but one reason for this failure could be lack of finance. During the early part of November, Miss Hughes, one of the Leicester campaigners appealed to her branch in Leicester for financial assistance ⁽⁹⁷⁾ but, in real terms, little could be done and by the end of November the Thrapston and Kettering branch was all but finished.

Unwilling to give up on Northamptonshire completely, Elsie Miller and Miss Hughes moved to 305 Wellingborough Road, Northampton to try again. Here the response was more positive and Miss Miller was able to report that the nucleus of the Northampton branch had been formed by the end of the year. ⁽⁹⁸⁾ From a report in the *Northampton*

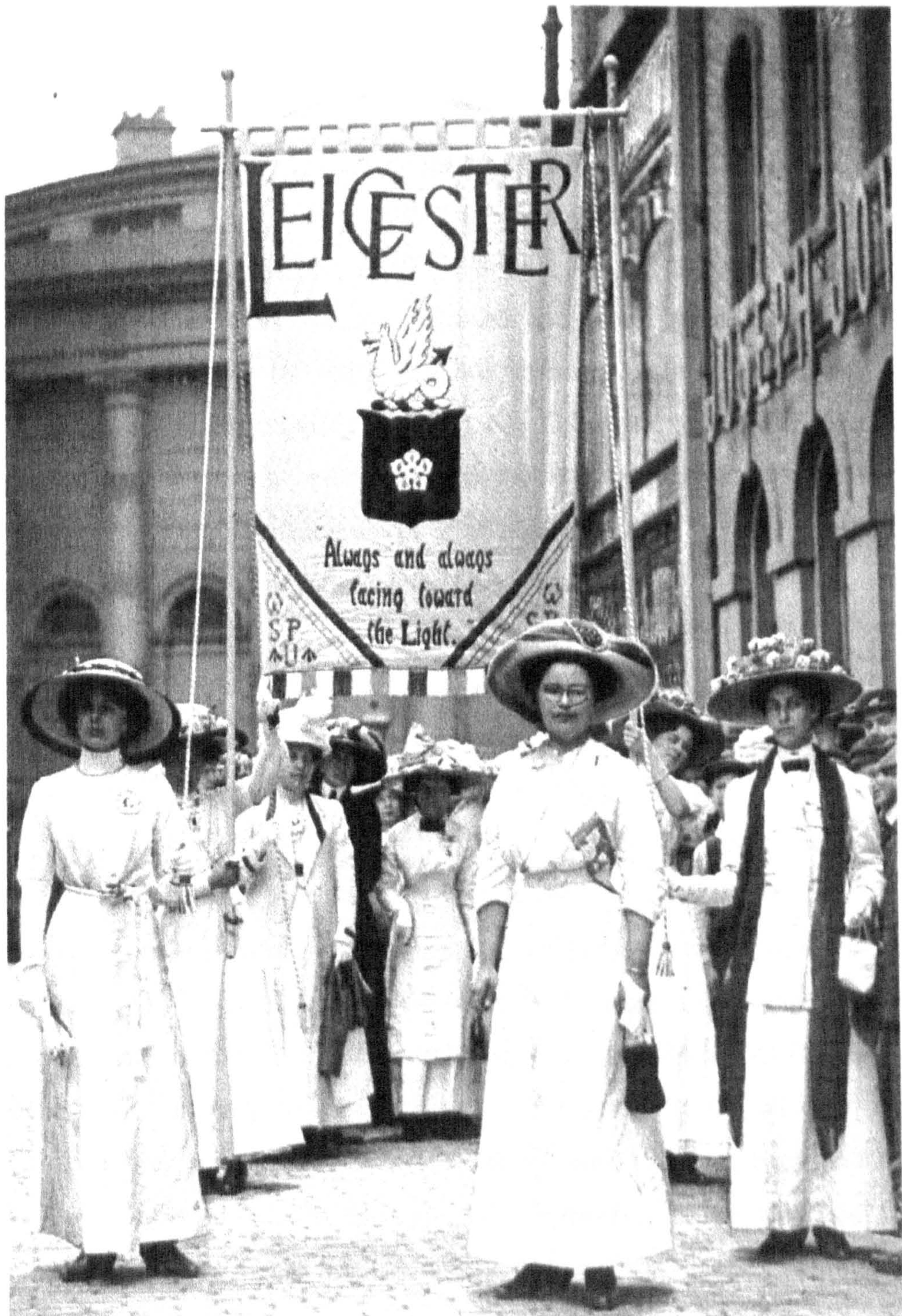
Daily Chronicle,* it is possible to know that the first meeting took place at the home of Mrs Crockett at East Park Parade on 11 December 1911 and was largely middle-class in composition. Moreover, the group also reflected the wide spectrum of political ideologies within the town. For example, on the one hand, Mrs Agnes Croft represented the Labour Party, while Mrs Collier, Mrs Ellis and Mrs Butterfield represented the Conservative Primrose League. The rest, like Mrs Brooks, Mrs Buswell, Mrs Gubbins and Mrs Beattie represented the Women's Liberal Association and a variety of different charitable and philanthropic societies around Northampton. ⁽⁹⁹⁾

IV

In Westminster, the political twists and turns of a Government reluctant to concede the issue continued to keep the militants guessing, while preparations were made around the East Midlands for the Coronation in June. However, this did not mean to say that, this time, the leadership had been completely taken in by Asquith's rhetoric and, although hoping for the best, some prepared for the worst by recruiting militants for active service. In Leicester, Dorothy Pethick's call to arms was received with enthusiasm and, in accordance with her promise to the court in London on 23 November 1910 to incite further women to revolt, she began to try and motivate the younger women coming into the group to take up militant action. Nevertheless, her efforts were met with mixed reactions and by early March she could only report that four women had signed up. ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ However, what they lacked in numbers they made up for with enthusiasm, as one woman's letter of acceptance makes clear,

I have decided to join the next deputation. Since definitely deciding I have been filled with a feeling of calm, so different from what I have experienced on other deputations when I felt that my 'duties' prevented my joining. Now I have no duty but one, and, that is to prepare for active service. ⁽¹⁰¹⁾

* One member, Mrs Butterfield, was married to the proprietor of the *Northampton Daily Chronicle*.



The Leicester WSPU outside their shop in Bowling Green Street with their banner in 1911. In the front is, left to right, Jane Lavina Wyatt, Dorothy Pethick and Dorothy Bowker. Alice Hawkins is at the back, third from left. Source, Leicestershire Records Office.

On 5 May, the Conciliation Bill passed its second reading by a majority of one hundred and sixty-seven, and as the previous year, it was promptly sent before a committee of the whole House. But despite her massive reservations, Christabel still managed to proclaim it a "great victory".⁽¹⁰²⁾ Yet within a fortnight, Lloyd George announced that no further time would be allowed for the bill during that session, but promised time would be made available in the next. This smacked of the treachery of 1910, and was duly greeted with anger within the ranks of the the WSPU. However, the WSPU did not immediately reinstate a policy of militancy because Christabel had been informed privately that Sir Edward Grey would clarify the situation at the beginning of June. Instead, Sir Edward Grey's statement of 1 June merely promised that the term "week" would be deemed "elastic" and that the Government's intentions were entirely honourable. Placated once more, the WSPU again relaxed and a "period of high optimism"⁽¹⁰³⁾ was ushered in as it continued its preparations to organise a large London rally.

Along with twenty-eight other women's suffrage societies, a massive Women's Coronation Procession for 17 June was planned. Headed by seven hundred ex-prisoners of the campaign, the procession comprised about 40,000 women who marched five abreast from the Embankment to the Albert Hall. At its height, the procession, comprising gaily dressed women with banners flying and historical costumes, stretched for seven miles.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Of course, in Leicester and Nottingham, the preparations for the event had been under way since the beginning of the year when it was decided to produce silk banners for the parade. As a result, all members were asked at their regular "At Homes" to help with the sewing and also to raise funds to cover the cost. In Leicester this was approximated at five pounds and⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ the first banner sewing meeting began in late April, under the watchful eye of its designer, Mrs Pemberton-Peake with the sessions continuing on Friday afternoons between three and six o'clock. *

It is interesting to note the scheduling of these meetings, for they possibly reflect the

* *Votes For Women*, on 28 April 1911, noted that the first banner sewing meeting was held at 130 Regents Road, Leicester and was continued every Friday afternoon. It was unveiled for the first time at the Girl's Friendly Society room in St Martin's on 12 June 1911. *Votes For Women*, 18 June, 1911.

continued influence of the new middle-class militant. They alone had the time and energy to construct the banner at a time when most working women were either still at work or needed in the home to look after husbands and children. The banner was eventually unveiled by Miss Nellie Crocker, the militant organiser from Nottingham and stood about five feet high and around three feet wide. It was suspended from a bamboo pole and was finished in the WSPU colours of white, green and purple. Across the bottom of the banner the inscription read, "Always and always facing toward the Light." Across the top, "Leicester" was emblazoned in large letters and the motif of the town, along with the Wyvern was displayed in the centre.

In Nottingham their banner was constructed locally and was painted by a local suffragette artist, Miss Eugene Richards. The crest was embroidered by two branch members, Miss Potter and Miss Fraser.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ As with Leicester, the finished product was about six feet high and about four feet wide. This too was suspended from poles, but unfortunately the colours used are now forgotten. Across the top "Nottingham" was picked out with the initials WSPU running down each side. In the middle, a picture of Nottingham's Coat of Arms was painted with the words, "Valour Survives Death" painted underneath. The banner was unveiled in Nottingham and was photographed by the *Nottingham Guardian* on 3 June 1911.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

By late autumn, it was becoming increasingly clear to the WSPU both in the East Midlands and in London that the Government was attempting to withdraw from its commitment. This belief had been fostered by Lloyd George's statement to the Cabinet, that if the Bill was allowed to pass into law as it then stood, the electoral register would favour the Conservatives. Instead, and with the full knowledge that any Bill that included working women would lose the support of many MPs within the House, he attempted to widen the Bill as much as possible under the guise of seeking justice for all. Conversely, this action set up a debate within the Labour Party that completely distracted members like Ramsay MacDonald from the merits of the Conciliation Bill. Instead their philosophical arguments that all ratepayers regardless of sex should vote further alienated the working-class members of the WSPU, who had, up to this point, remained loyal to the Pankhurst

line. In all events, the debate was to prove academic, as Asquith completely torpedoed the Conciliation Bill by announcing that his Government would introduce a Manhood Suffrage Bill that would be free for amendment to include women.

This measure was never going to be acceptable to the WSPU and as a result the different branches were called together in the Albert Hall where Christabel Pankhurst outlined the next move by insisting that an amendment for limited female suffrage tacked onto a Manhood Suffrage Bill was totally unacceptable and that the Government must sponsor the Conciliation Bill if the truce was to last. However, the Coronation and the fight with the House of Lords were out of the way and there was no need for the Government to continue the deception any further. Instead all pretences were dropped and the WSPU again took up the militant cause, but this time with increasing violence. Consequently, the tenth Women's Parliament opened in Caxton Hall on 21 November with a deputation of Leicester and Nottingham women sitting in the stalls. ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ Towards the end of the session, Mrs Pethick Lawrence, standing in for Mrs Pankhurst, who was in America, led a deputation from the Hall to Parliament Square where the usual cordon of police awaited them.

However, although Miss Elizabeth Frisby and Corrie Swain were arrested for police obstruction during the ensuing struggle, Mrs Alice Hawkins was not there. She had been told to meet a group of women at the WSPU shop at 156 Charing Cross Road. She, like the rest, had been told to wear no badges nor insignias and to dress in normal clothes. Then, armed with bags of stones and hammers, supplied to them at the shop, they set out to attack windows of government offices and business premises. In the end, two hundred and twenty women were arrested, including the three women from the East Midlands. Alice Hawkins was eventually charged with breaking a window in the Home Office and given twenty-one days. Both Miss Frisby and Corrie Swain were given five days apiece for assaulting police officers. ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ With the closing of the prison gates behind them, not only were all hopes of peace dashed, but also all pretence of political compromise went too. Within the ranks of the suffragettes no longer would there be any illusion as to the intentions of the Asquith Government. Metaphorically speaking, the gloves were off and

the war between subject and government would begin in earnest. For their part, the Government sought to financially cripple the WSPU and silence its voice through the confiscation of the *Suffragette's* printing press, while the WSPU, on the other hand, under the direction and guidance of Christabel Pankhurst in Paris, were not only forced underground and out of the main debate, they also became locked in a desperate guerrilla war with male society in order to survive.

CHAPTER FIVE

Truce, New Horizons For Northampton And The Branches And The Expansion Of Trade Unionism In Leicester

- (1) Votes For Women, 28 January 1910.
- (2) Votes For Women, 17 December 1909.
- (3) Joseph Frisby of "One Oak" Stoughton Drive, Leicester, owned a boot and shoe factory at 66 Humberstone Road. Kelly's Directory.
- (4) Noted in various newspaper reports in the Leicester Mercury, and The Pioneer.
- (5) The Suffragette, 5 December 1913.
- (6) This trend is detected by counting number of meetings held in large halls recorded in the local press and comparing it with what had been noted earlier.
- (7) Votes For Women, 10 March 1911.
- (8) Votes For Women, 20 July 1909.
- (9) Reports of their meeting and activities dried up, not only in the local press, but also in Votes For Women.
- (10) Votes For Women, July 1909.
- (11) Nottingham Guardian, 24 January 1911.
- (12) E. Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffrage Movement, London, Virago Press, 1977, p. 335.
- (13) Ibid, p. 335.
- (14) Andrew Rosen, Rise Up Women, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p. 193.
- (15) Ibid, p.194.
- (16) Public Records Office, Kew, Richmond Upon Thames, London, Cabinet Papers, CAB 24 / 57.
- (17) Dame Christabel Pankhurst, Unshackled: The Story Of How We Won The Vote, London, Hutchinson, 1958, p. 153-4.
- (18) The Pioneer, 6 May 1910.
- (19) Ibid.

- (20) Andrew Rosen, Rise Up Women : The Militant Campaign Of The WSPU 1903 - 1914, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p. 131.
- (21) Northampton Mercury, 8 January 1910.
- (22) Ibid.
- (23) Northampton Mercury, 30 July 1909.
- (24) Northampton Mercury, 8 January 1910.
- (25) Northampton Daily Chronicle, 12 January 1910.
- (26) Quoted in John Foster, Class Struggle And The Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism In Three English Towns, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974.
- (27) Votes For Women, 21 January 1910.
- (28) Nottingham Daily Express, 12 January 1910.
- (29) Nottingham Daily Express, 26 February 1910.
- (30) The Pioneer, 26 January 1910.
- (31) The Pioneer, 29 January 1910.
- (32) Leicester Chronicle, 8 January 1910.
- (33) Antonia Raeburn, Militant Suffragettes, Newton Abbot, Michael Joseph, 1974, p. 140.
- 34) R. K. Webb, Modern England, London, Allen and Unwin, (4th Imp 1985), p. 465.
- (35) Antonia Raeburn, Militant Suffragettes, Newton Abbot, Michael Joseph, 1974, p. 143.
- (36) David Mitchell, Queen Christabel, London, MacDonald, 1977.
- (37) Ibid, p. 153.
- (38) All local reports of the organisations dry up. Of course, that might reflect a loss of interest on behalf of the newspapers, but this seems unlikely as any political meeting, however insignificant, was fully reported.
- (39) Votes For Women, 18 June 1910.
- (40) Ibid.
- (41) Daily Express, 24 July 1910.

- (42) Roger Fulford, Votes For Women, London, Faber and Faber, 1958, p. 207.
- (43) Votes For Women, 22 April 1910.
- (44) Antonia Raeburn, Militant Suffragettes, Newton Abbot, Michael Joseph, 1974, p. 152.
- (45) Votes For Women, 22 November 1910.
- (46) Ibid.
- (47) Quoted in Antonia Raeburn, Militant Suffragettes, Newton Abbot, Michael Joseph, 1974, p. 153.
- (48) Votes For Women, 22 November 1910.
- (49) David Mitchell, Queen Christabel, London, MacDonald, 1977, p. 160.
- (50) Ibid, p. 161
- (51) Roger Fulford, Votes For Women, London, Faber and Faber, 1958, p. 202.
- (52) Newark Museum, Leicester, No Reference, letter to Alfred Hawkins in Bradford from Alice Hawkins in Putney, dated 22 November 1910.
- (53) Votes For Women, 29 November 1910.
- (54) Newark Museum, Leicester, No Reference, letter to Alfred Hawkins in Bradford from Alice Hawkins in Putney, dated 22 November 1910.
- (55) Votes For Women, November 1910.
- (56) Les Garner, Stepping Stones To Women's Liberty, London, Heinemann, 1984, p. 49.
- (57) David Mitchell, Queen Christabel, London, MacDonald, 1977, p. 173.
- (58) There is no mention in the Cabinet Papers that this was his policy.
- (59) Andrew Rosen, Rise Up Women, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p. 148.
- (60) Dame Christabel Pankhurst, Unshackled: The Story Of How We Won The Vote, London, Hutchinson, 1959, p. 172.
- (61) The Pioneer, 7 January 1911.
- (62) Votes For Women, 7 January 1911.

- (63) Alan Fox, A History of the National Union Of Boot and Shoe Operatives, 1874 - 1957, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 308
- (64) Sara Boston, Women Workers And The Trade Union Movement, London, Davis - Poynter, 1980, p. 74.
- (65) Minutes of the Leicester Board of Conciliation and Arbitration, quoted in Monthly Report, December 1907, Wheatsheaf Co-operative factory archives, Leicester.
- (66) Alan Fox, A History of the National Union Of Boot And Shoe Operatives, 1874-1957, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 308.
- (67) Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, New York, Equinox, (2nd Ed 1970), p. 73.
- (68) Betty Friedman, The Feminine Mystique, Harmondsworth, Pelican, (7th Edn, 1982), Page 71.
- (69) Ibid, p. 73.
- (70) Nottingham Records Office, DD8934, Helen Watts.
- (71) Alan Fox, A History of the National Union Of Boot and Shoe Operatives, 1874 - 1957, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1958, p.310.
- (72) The Pioneer, 15 June 1908.
- (73) The Pioneer, 11 February 1911.
- (74) Newark Museum, Leicester, Unsorted, Alice Hawkins, copy of letter to T. F. Richards, General President of National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, dated 4 October 1911.
- (75) The Pioneer, 15 June 1908.
- (76) Alan Fox, A History of the National Union Of Boot And Shoe Operatives, 1874-1957, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 311.
- (77) Sara Boston, Women Workers And The Trade Union Movement, London, Davis - Poynter, 1980, p. 75.
- (78) Alan Fox, A History of the National Union Of Boot and Shoe Operatives, 1874 - 1957, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 311.
- (79) Leicester Mercury, 5 October 1911.
- (80) Sara Boston, Women Workers And The Trade Union Movement, London,

- Davis - Poynter, 1980, p. 75.
- (81) The Pioneer, 2 September 1911.
 - (82) Alan Fox, A History of the National Union Of Boot And Shoe Operatives, 1874-1957, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 311.
 - (83) Women's Co-operative Guild, 28th Annual Report, 1911.
 - (84) Marian Ramelson, Petticoat Rebellion, London, Lawrence and Wishart, (3rd Edn), 1976.
 - (85) Ibid, p. 30.
 - (86) Barbara Drake, Women In Trade Unions, London, Virago Press, 1984.
 - (87) Quoted in Barbara Drake, Women In Trade Unions, London, Virago Press, 1984, p. 46.
 - (88) Northampton Mercury, 11 October 1912.
 - (89) Leicestershire County Records Office, Suffragette Collection, postcard from Eva Lines.
 - (90) Letter from unnamed correspondent to the Leicester Mercury, October 1911.
 - (91) Votes For Women, 19 March 1911.
 - (92) Votes For Women, September 1911.
 - (93) Northampton Mercury, 12 April 1912.
 - (94) Norbert Solden, Women In British Trade Unions, 1874 - 1976, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987.
 - (95) Ibid, p. 60.
 - (96) Votes For Women, 3 March 1911.
 - (97) Votes For Women, 3 November 1911.
 - (98) Northampton Mercury, 22 December 1911.
 - (99) Northampton Daily Chronicle, 11 December 1911.
 - (100) Votes For Women, 8 March 1912
 - (101) Votes For Women, 19 May 1911.
 - (102) Andrew Rosen, Rise Up Women, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p. 149.
 - (103) Votes For Women, 14 April 1911.

- (104) Votes For Women, 24 June 1912.
- (105) Votes For Women, 27 November 1911.
- (106) Nottingham Guardian 3 June 1911.
- (107) Ibid.
- (108) Votes For Women, 10 November 1912.
- (109) Votes For Women, 24 November 1912.

Chapter Six

THE RETURN TO MILITANCY AND ITS POLITICAL, ECONOMICAL AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

Influenced by the rejection of the Conciliation Bill and the promise by Asquith to introduce a wider Reform Bill that would make Tory support impossible, the WSPU entered into what would be its final and most violent phase. Over the next few years to 1914, the movement, both nationally and at local level, underwent a series of reforms that would transform the character and composition of the Union as never before. Yet very few at the time could comprehend the consequences these forces of change would bring, nor the effect the transformation would have on the members as they moved away from the semblance of a pressure group to something akin to an illegal organisation that fought a guerrilla war with the Government. These forces of change were both internal and external to the movement and created impulses that can be traced back to the leadership of both the WSPU and the Government. Thus, it is essential to see this period in terms of not only how the Leicester and Nottingham WSPU had come to reach this point, but more crucially, to explore and assess the role the antagonism between the Government and Christabel Pankhurst played in this change.

As it has been pointed out, in both towns, the local unions had already undergone a limited process of change from 1910 onwards and by the end of 1912 both had become a highly motivated, professional group of women entirely dedicated to the Pankhurst family. However, the consequences of the return to militancy in the form of vandalism and arson were to prove potentially damaging to both branches, and indeed to the loyalty of some of the working-class women. Dedicated as these women were, the following

years were to test their commitment to the limit. Further, not only did the leadership, under the stewardship of Christabel Pankhurst, lead these women into a full-blown sex-war with men, she also destroyed any hope of political support, at a time when many within the ranks of the Labour Party and the Liberals had begun to feel a measure of sympathy for the women and their cause. In many ways the organisation was to be wrong-footed by its pursuit of Christabel's policies and, as a result, would be excluded from the very real political debate that was about to unfold. On the ground, the long-term effects of these policies were felt in different ways by the local branches. In Nottingham, the branch blossomed and embraced the new militant tactics with much candour, while in Leicester, the results of the increased suffragette militancy led to a further reduction in the number of working women wishing to involve themselves in such actions, and caused the local Labour Party to withdraw from offering any support that they felt might help.⁽¹⁾ Yet by comparison, the Northampton branch's reaction was entirely different and serves to cast doubts on the assumption that all women within the WSPU at this time followed the Pankhursts' dogma, regardless of personal feelings.

Although the blame for these changes might be levelled at the growing isolation of the WSPU leaders at Clement's Inn and their inability to devise a policy to suit changing circumstances, it is also possible to argue that the outbreak of militancy in 1911 was a result of an extension of government policy and an active desire to rid itself of the burden of the women's movement. Leaving aside the very real problems the Liberals faced in Ireland and the House of Lords, votes for women was not an argument that had been won in the hearts and minds of many members of the Government. It had become increasingly obvious to the Cabinet that the potential spectre of women hunger-striking in lonely prison cells "created a martyrdom of far greater magnitude than the martyrdom incurred by imprisonment alone."⁽²⁾ Therefore, to Churchill and Asquith it might be argued that the solution appeared quite clear; they had to discredit the WSPU in the eyes of the general public before the situation deteriorated further. For example, the use of the hunger strike and the subsequent implementation of force-feeding brought many Local Government bodies to support the enfranchisement of women. In Leicester, Nottingham and Northampton, the municipalities, along with other industrial areas of the Midlands

because they were unwilling to concede to votes for women in any real sense, he feared the Government would “fall” over what he termed “petticoat politics.”⁶⁾ As a result, there is some evidence to suggest that the Cabinet took the view that in order to quash the WSPU and other militant organisations they had to destroy, in the eyes of the general public, the suffragettes’ good standing for once and for all.

To this end, it seemed to many, including political commentators in Nottingham, more than likely that Hobhouse’s “The burning of Nottingham Castle” speech in Bristol, was used as a stalking-horse to incite women to further acts of violence. * As Charles Hickling pointed out in the *Nottingham Daily Express*,

The recent attacks on buildings and letter boxes seem to have arisen from a remark by a Cabinet Minister.... and the challenger is not free from blame.⁷⁾

Indeed, not only would the Government have an ideal excuse to arrest and imprison the leaders, they could also claim, with some justification, the moral high ground in the knowledge that any feelings of public sympathy would melt away at the destruction of private property. To some extent, this view proved entirely correct, and after the destruction of letters in pillar-boxes in both Nottingham and Leicester in 1912, the WSPU was swamped with cries of outrage and protest. In Leicester, Gladys Hazel, the new area

* There is evidence in the Fawcett Library to suggest that Christabel really wanted to burn down Nottingham Castle in the spring of 1912, as Sylvia Pankhurst later recalled a message from Christabel that read, “Would you burn down Nottingham Castle?” She replied that she would only lead a torchlight procession to the castle and fling her torch at its walls as a symbolic act.

like Birmingham, Coventry and Derby all demonstrated their support for the WSPU when they signed a declaration in 1911 in favour of the Conciliation Bill.⁽³⁾ In other ways too, local newspapers like the *Leicester Daily Post* confirmed all too often the validity of their case and went on to say that “Both time and the march of events are alike on their side.”⁽⁴⁾ Consequently, it was in the face of such overwhelming public support that Churchill had come to sum up the feelings of some members of the Government when he commented that, “We are getting into very great peril over female suffrage”⁽⁵⁾ and that,

organiser based in Birmingham, was forced on to the defensive ⁽⁸⁾ and attempted to justify their action by arguing that the attacks were symptomatic of the strong feelings prevalent amongst supporters of the suffrage movement, born out of years of frustration and the way they had been treated by the Government. She further pointed out that, in forty years of constitutional agitation, nothing had been accomplished and if the WSPU was forced to unconstitutional methods, people should not be too surprised. ⁽⁹⁾ However, despite the force of her arguments, she might well have saved her breath as these new acts of militancy were, in the main, lost on the general public. It was collectively shocked and outraged at the change of policy. Indeed, in Nottingham it was suggested that the women be publicly flogged. Responding to this call, one woman, Miss Margaret Haly, indignantly replied that, if she were, then that might help public opinion, and put forward the view that they were "fighting for the vote....and only by smashing windows and damaging letters can we convince the Government that we are in earnest." ⁽¹⁰⁾

Although this process of change and the increasing use of vandalism as a weapon was possibly Government-led, it most certainly could not have occurred without the growing erratic behaviour of Christabel Pankhurst, who had consistently demonstrated "a lack of political insight and even commonsense," ⁽¹¹⁾ as she oscillated between militancy and conciliation. But, by the end of 1912, incensed by Asquith's obstructionism, she had returned to the war against the Liberals with a renewed vigour that gave little thought to the consequences her actions would have on the Union. At first, to many WSPU members around the country, the prospect of future militancy proved appealing and the offices of the Union were again flooded with pledges of support in any militant action. ⁽¹²⁾ In Leicester and, to a lesser extent, Nottingham, the news of further militancy appears to have been received with some delight and several members of the Young Hot Blood Club, undeterred by arrests the previous year, enrolled for active service in the coming fight. ⁽¹³⁾ Undoubtedly, this kind of response was, by and large, not unusual and only serves to demonstrate the often insular, single-mindedness of many of the Pankhurst followers. Yet in Northampton the picture was entirely different. The call to militancy was all but rejected out of hand. ⁽¹⁴⁾

As we have seen, the Northampton branch was unlike Leicester and Nottingham, yet in some ways it was much the same. Like Leicester, it had been formed around the boot and shoe industry, and many of its members were either engaged in the manufacture of boots and shoes or their husbands were, like Mrs Margaret Tebbutt, who lived along St Matthew's Parade.⁽¹⁵⁾ Her husband, a member of the Foreman's Association, belonged to the labour aristocracy and was a foreman at a local Boot and Shoe Manufacturer within the town.⁽¹⁶⁾ This is an important point and serves to underlie the difficulty of recruiting these women for militant acts. Indeed, at least seven other members' husbands were involved in the manufacture of boots and shoes in small family concerns while others belonged to Northampton's political oligarchy. (see *Table 6.2*)



Mrs Beattie of Northampton.
Source, *Northampton Daily Chronicle*, 29 October 1913.

Table 6.1

<u>WSPU Member</u>	<u>Husband's Occupation</u>
Mrs Garrett	Small Family Boot and Shoe Manufacturer
Mrs Gubbins	Small Family Boot and Shoe Manufacturer
Mrs Branch	Small Family Boot and Shoe Manufacturer
Mrs Mabel Crockett	Small Family Boot and Shoe Manufacturer
Mrs Church	Member of the Church Boot and Shoe Family
Mrs Collier	Small Family Boot and Shoe Manufacturer
Mrs Tebbutt	Boot and Shoe Foreman
Mrs Clarke	Boot and Shoe Foreman

Thus, when called upon to commit criminal acts against property they reacted with indignation and horror and no amount of persuasion by the national leadership could talk them round, although this might well have had something to do with the fact that one of their members, Mrs Mardlin, of 11 St Giles Street, was married to the Chief Constable of

Table 6.2

<u>Husbands of WSPU Members</u>	<u>Political Position</u>
George Wilson Beattie	Liberal Mayor of Northampton
Henry Butterfield	Alderman, Northampton Town Council
Thomas Collier	Conservative Councillor
John Brown	Liberal Mayor of Northampton
Mr Buswell	Liberal Councillor
Alfred Cockerill	Alderman, Northampton Town Council
Harold Croft	Labour Councillor
Frederick Ellen	Conservative Councillor
Walter Gubbins	Member Northampton Liberal Association And Liberal Councillor

Thus, when Lady Margesson descended on them in February 1912, at the home of one of their members, Mrs Bensley * in Sheep Street, to justify the orders of Christabel, both Mrs Beattie and Mrs Rose Tebbutt publicly criticised the actions of the militants as “awful hooliganism” and told the meeting that Lady Margesson’s speech had not convinced her that militancy was the right and proper course.⁽¹⁸⁾ Some time later, in an open letter to the *Northampton Daily Chronicle*, she defended her actions and rebuked Elsie Miller’s accusation that she had no right to pass judgement on the militants when she just sat at home and did nothing. “No cause, however good,” she wrote, “could justify women stooping to what many people regard as ‘hooliganism.’ That, to me, it is not so much the fact of their wrapping up their stones in paper which matters, as the fact that they have lowered themselves by the throwing of those stones” (sic). She went on to attack the leadership in person and declared that,

Mrs Pankhurst and her prototypes are a danger to the community, their

* Her husband, Dr Edwin Bensley came to Northampton to be a physician at the Medical Institute in Broad Street. Later he had a private practice in Sheep Street.

influence has worked unhappiness in homes that once were happy.... but I grieve for those women..... who are suffering in prison through the instrumentality of the ring leaders. ⁽¹⁹⁾

The day following the meeting at Mrs Bensley's home, Christabel Pankhurst arrived at the Palace Theatre to try and appeal to the Northampton branch herself, and with some insight into the problem, addressed the women's husbands who were there. In a rousing speech she implored the men when she said,

I know some of you do not believe in our methods. Now you men, do not go home and in front of your fire lay it down to your women folk that our methods are wrong.... We could not get the vote by constitutional methods because we have no constitutional weapon. Because we do not have the vote, we cannot get the vote. ⁽²⁰⁾

However, even the eloquent Christabel could not get the women, nor indeed the men, to change their minds. Undeterred, Christabel philosophically reflected that the time was not yet right and when

Northampton thinks our cause is right, and that is only a matter of time, it will be significant, because what Northampton thinks, politically.... matters very much. ⁽²¹⁾

Unfortunately for Christabel and the WSPU, the Northampton branch failed to supply the promised radicals, and although the group remained in place to 1914, militancy of the new kind was, by and large, rejected throughout the period. Of course, some women, like Mrs Croft, wife of the local ILP organiser ⁽²²⁾ and Mrs Collier, a former member of the Primrose League, somewhat lamely defended the militant actions of the WSPU, but in reality, Northampton suffered no real militant actions. On the other hand, this restraint was to hold them in good stead when it came to seeking support from the Trades' Council and the ILP.

Christabel Pankhurst's militancy, nevertheless, brought into play the young unmarried, middle-class hot blood radicals like Elizabeth Frisby and Cameron Swain in Leicester, and Charlotte Marsh in Nottingham. On the whole, they were more than willing to increase direct action within the organisation. Indeed, Miss Cameron Swain, Mrs Bennett and her daughter, Dorothy, volunteered for active service by telegram and by 4 March found themselves at the Albert Hall in London to hear Mrs Pankhurst inform them that "the argument of the stone, that time-honoured official political argument" ⁽²³⁾ was now official WSPU policy. Interestingly enough, while this meeting was taking place, other Leicester women were preparing to take the Government by surprise and struck without warning in the West End of London. Only a quarter of an hour before the shops were due to close, young women strolling amongst the late-night shoppers suddenly produced from the depths of muffs and bags a large quantity of hammers and stones and, "from every part of the crowds and brilliantly lighted streets came the crash of splintered glass." ⁽²⁴⁾

Of those arrested was a young Leicester militant who entirely reflected the new ethos of Christabel's ideal. Miss Cameron Swain, daughter of Mrs Cornelian Swain * of Regents Street, had been arrested twice in November 1911 and was now detained again, but this time she was sentenced to four months hard labour for breaking windows in New Bond Street. ** True to form, immediately upon being placed in prison she went on hunger strike and was subjected to the horrors of force-feeding during her sentence. However, such deeds did not go unnoticed by the national leadership and when Dorothy Pethick, possibly because of the growing friction between her sister and Christabel Pankhurst, later announced that she intended to step down, Cameron Swain was appointed temporary organising secretary for the Leicester branch in June 1912.

But their radical enthusiasm was to cause wide-spread problems for the organisation as a whole. In much the same way as it had affected the women in Northampton, working

* Her husband was a surgeon at the Leicester Royal Infirmary.

* * According to the *Suffragette*, one was the premises of Mr Jules Richard, a camera manufacturer, valued at £15 and the other was a window valued at £60 at the premises of a jeweller, Alfred Clark.

women within the Leicester branch were alienated by the increasing use of violence and vandalism. Yet, unlike their counterparts in Northampton, they left the organisation in increasing numbers. In this way dissent was controlled and it allowed the branch to become more middle-class based. Yet, while many of Christabel Pankhurst's supporters, both in and out of the WSPU, had come to realise that she had become intoxicated with power and in reality, by the end of 1911, needed little excuse to resort to further acts of vandalism or arson, she was, of course, not entirely without vision and recognised quite quickly that Hobhouse's declaration would have "a decisive effect on the future course of the women's suffrage movement." ⁽²⁵⁾ But to what extent these changes would help or hinder the cause, she remained uncertain. However, although Christabel was neither "ignorant nor stupid" ⁽²⁶⁾ she often lacked the Machiavellian arts so adeptly practised by Asquith and the Cabinet and from the onset of renewed militancy she not only willingly and unwillingly subjected the movement to splits and dissension, by her intransigence to seek a more diplomatic route, she also isolated the WSPU from any worthwhile debate. Yet, that is not to say that the Government would have been more accommodating had they continued their truce, far from it. However, another path lay open to her in the policies formulated by the Pethick-Lawrences, and that was to continue militant action within the bounds of public support.

For their part, the Pethick-Lawrences were deeply alarmed at the change of events. ⁽²⁷⁾ They reasoned quite rightly that if the WSPU took Christabel's path it would not only alienate the movement from public support, it would practically drive the Union underground. Instead they argued, with some justification, that because the organisation had never been in such a strong position as it then was, Christabel should return from Paris to challenge the Government and allow the WSPU to mount a campaign "which would restrict the ability of the Government to act... and this would lead to its ignominious defeat." ⁽²⁸⁾ However, Christabel refused the advice given and continued her self imposed-exile in France where, removed from the heart of the movement, she appeared to grow more and more nervous at her position within the WSPU. Deeply suspicious of, on the one hand, Sylvia's ambitions and the Pethick-Lawrences' conciliatory approach to militancy on the other, she began a series of measures that would

keep the WSPU within her influence and protect the organisation from the “new elements...who would put peace or party politics, or both, before votes for women.”⁽²⁹⁾ In effect, this not only meant reorganising the branches, during the autumn of 1912, into larger areas or groups, it also meant removing from positions of influence any member of the WSPU who was not totally committed to her or her mother’s decisions, and almost by default this meant the Pethick-Lawrences and Sylvia Pankhurst on a national level, and at a local level, the leaders of the branches in Leicester and Nottingham. In both towns, the leadership of the branches was controlled



Charlotte Marsh.
Source, Alice Hawkins’ scrapbook.

by blood-relations of the Pethick-Lawrences. For instance, in Nottingham, Nellie Crocker was a cousin of Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, while in Leicester, Dorothy Pethick was, of course, her sister.

As a result of this in-fighting, both Nellie Crocker and Dorothy Pethick announced they intended to step down as organisers⁽³⁰⁾ and, in doing so, created a crisis of leadership that allowed both branches to fall into a period of uncertainty and inactivity. However, to counter any break-up of the provincial branches, both Nottingham and the Leicester group, with its off-shoots in Loughborough and Market Harborough, for reasons of “putting the branch on a firm financial footing,”⁽³¹⁾ were brought into one large “Local Union” under the direct control of Gladys Hazel* in Birmingham with Cameron Swain acting as local leader in Leicester and Charlotte Marsh in Nottingham. On the face of it,

* Gladys Hazel controlled a wide area, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Birmingham, Wolverhampton and most of the Black Country.

this statement of putting the branch on a more firm financial footing was not entirely without foundation; indeed, throughout the summer of 1912, there were many rumours abounding that the WSPU was suffering from a lack of motivation, primarily due to Christabel's absence from Britain and Mrs Pankhurst's constant visits to prison. Consequently, by the middle of 1913, the *Daily Mail* ⁽³²⁾ had published an article that suggested the WSPU was suffering financially from a declining membership, poor administration and disorganisation. In some ways, this observation appeared to be correct in that, throughout this period, much was made by the WSPU of the need for local branches to raise more and more cash to go towards what they called their "war chest." But, regardless of any truth in these interpretations, the changes did bring about a period of instability within the organisation. Whether this was also true of elsewhere is hard to say, but for the Leicester and Nottingham branches it appears to be a period of much upheaval and the Leicester branch managed at least four different leaders until the arrival of Kitty Marion in May 1914.

In Nottingham, the news of the reorganisation was announced to the branch by Mrs Sheppard in November in the Friends Adult School rooms in Friar Lane. ⁽³³⁾ In their absence, she told the members that both Nellie Crocker and Gladys Roberts had quit the branch and that Gladys Hazel from Birmingham was to step in temporarily and give the branch a measure of leadership. However, it was probable that the branch was in serious danger of disintegration which made it all the more important for her to travel from Birmingham to take control. Of course, she was now responsible for a wide area, but other than this short sojourn, she remained exclusively in Birmingham. By the end of the month, Charlotte Marsh * had been appointed and arrived in December 1912. Almost from the start, she imposed her authority and pulled the branch out of its lethargy. Throughout much of 1912, Nellie Crocker and Gladys Roberts' leadership had waned and the branch declined until it appeared to be revolving around a small group of women. In important matters they proved highly reluctant to give any clear lead on the branch's future direction and as the membership dwindled the group became something of a joke.

* Born in 1887 in Northumberland, Miss Marsh became the official standard-bearer for the WSPU and carried their banner at the funeral of Emily Wilding Davison. Before taking control of the Nottingham Branch, she had been organiser for Leeds and Bradford.

Even in the usually high-pressure confrontation tactics used against visiting Cabinet Ministers, Nellie Crocker's attacks were rather colourless and unimpressive. On two separate occasions in early 1912, the branch was ridiculed and derided when members attempted to ambush visiting Government Ministers. Indeed, when they sought to waylay Mr Runciman, President of the Board of Agriculture, at a local meeting, they mistook a local clergyman for the Liberal Minister to the great glee of those present. Such was their embarrassment, they were forced to retire amid peels of laughter. ⁽³⁴⁾

After the appointment of Miss Marsh, the branch developed and matured throughout 1913 and, measured against the national movement, became one of the most active branches outside the capital. Indeed, throughout this period, it carried out a proportionally higher number of arson attacks, ruined letters in pillar-boxes and destroyed telegraph wires than any other provincial group. Perhaps its biggest act of arson was the firing of England's largest Dutch barn at Bulcote farm in March 1914. At its peak, the fire could be seen from miles around and caused £3,000 worth of damage. ⁽³⁵⁾ Moreover, within six months the branch carried out over fifty attacks on pillar-boxes within the Nottingham area alone and smashed the plate-glass windows of two shops in the city centre. As Charlotte Marsh reflected in Ilkeston on 22 November, "This is nothing to what is to follow." ⁽³⁶⁾ In this respect, her prediction proved more than true, as 1913 proved to be an extremely busy year for the Nottingham branch. Interestingly enough, the amount of vandalism attributed to this group far outweighs other provincial groups, but it was not without its problems. The male backlash that had marred their early years was to return with a vengeance. Not only were public meetings in the marketplace extremely dangerous, indoor meetings were becoming increasingly so. For example, when Annie Kenney attempted to address a WSPU meeting in the Circus Street Hall, in March 1913, wild outbursts from crowds of men and youths rendered the meeting useless. ⁽³⁷⁾ Despite the fact that men had been prevented from attending, hundreds gained entry through a back door and proceeded to wreck the meeting.

At one point, fireworks were strewn around and towards the back of the hall a man drew a revolver and fired at the speakers on the stage. ⁽³⁸⁾ Although many police were on duty,

they were powerless to cope with the disorder until reinforcements were called and the hall cleared. Unfortunately, during the melee, not only was one WSPU member badly cut around the head requiring medical attention, but also the hall suffered several broken windows and sustained minor damage to fixtures and fittings.

As a result of this meeting, the Nottingham Watch Committee received a claim for damages from the Circus Street Hall. ⁽³⁹⁾ Of course, the claim was rejected but it set in motion a train of events that proved damaging to the Nottingham WSPU in the long term. At first, the Chief Constable suggested that a communication should be sent to the owners of all Nottingham's halls intimating that should the WSPU wish to hold a meeting in their halls the owners must take full responsibility for any damages that might occur. ⁽⁴⁰⁾ This, of course, led to a number of owners declining any WSPU bookings if the WSPU themselves would not underwrite against the possibility of any future damage. On this point, the letter circulated by the Chief Constable is an interesting document in itself, in that the wording of the Watch Committee is based on the assumption that any WSPU meeting was likely to cause a breach of the peace. Further, it added that should a meeting be allowed to take place, the Watch Committee would measure its response to that decision. At the time, many officials within the town hall believed that the letter amounted to a subtle form of prohibition of WSPU meetings in public halls, and although quietly disturbed at the erosion of liberal principles, they were sufficiently hostile to militant feminism to turn a blind eye.

On the other hand, in typical WSPU fashion, the branch responded with the accusation that it was a public confession by the Watch Committee that they could not, or would not, carry out the simple and easy task of putting down the disorganised hooligan element bent on disrupting WSPU meetings. Indeed, this view was not without its supporters and a reporter of the *Nottingham Daily Express* believed the actions of the police denied the WSPU any rights as citizens when holding strictly legal meetings. He argued, with some passion and conviction, that even criminals had the right to be protected from mob violence. ⁽⁴¹⁾ In the end, the lack of protection by the police gave an almost tacit acceptance of attacks on militant suffragettes, and as a result the WSPU's shop windows

in Derby Road were broken on two successive weekends by a shower of stones. ⁽⁴²⁾ Further, grudging reluctance on behalf of hall owners to hire out their halls to militant meetings forced the WSPU, for the time being anyway, to hold their public meetings in private houses. In London, the police and local authorities, with an eye to the Nottingham experience, adopted similar tactics, and the following month the Commissioner of Police in London confirmed to the WSPU that he had advised the Home Secretary that,

Having regard to the character of the speeches delivered thereat, it is not practicable by any police arrangement to obviate the possibility of similar disorder occurring if such meetings are held..... The Home Department has directed me to instruct the Metropolitan Police to take such steps as are necessary, and within their power to prevent such meetings being held. ⁽⁴³⁾

II

Perhaps the greatest consequence of Christabel Pankhurst's forced exile in Paris, besides the growth in her paranoia most noted by Henry Nevinston, * was its effect upon the local branches. Out of touch with the leadership, and for the most part left to the ad hoc policies of the local organisers, an increasing strain was placed upon their loyalty and commitment to stay faithful to the Pankhurst line. And now, at the beginning of 1913, their allegiance was again strained and tested, and for many a choice between Church and the WSPU was now needed. Yet for her part, increasingly isolated and, perhaps, a little fearful of her own position within the WSPU, she began, with the expressed desire to bolster a flagging campaign, a moral crusade that was, through the assault on the Church, to test and try the patience of all but the dedicated few. As Les Garner has suggested, ⁽⁴⁴⁾ it perhaps reflected the political bankruptcy of Christabel Pankhurst and the militant campaign, but it also exposed a trace of ambivalence in Christabel's faith. While her

* He noted in his diary in October 1913, "The suspicions and jealousies, the reckless discharging of organisers, the refusal to have the best speakers to speak....the suspicion of the MPU, of Harben and especially of me.... The whole thing is a kind of spy mania, a kind of possession. Christabel has actually thought we were plotting to extradite her! It is the nearest thing to insanity I've known in the movement".

religious feelings were conventionally expressed in much of the earlier campaigns, her later attacks on the established Church suggests a religious experience more powerful and more private than conventional piety. Indeed, at her instigation, within the WSPU was the development of an almost quasi-religious element to their campaign. Of course, this was not really a new angle, as many local women, notably Helen Watts and others, like the Nottingham suffragette, Penelope*, had taken this line for some years and often laced their message with religious messages and religious connotations. In the *Nottingham Guardian*, for example, Penelope argued that,

The militant suffragettes are accounted 'She Devils' today, but tomorrow they will be classed with the ever increasing number of saints who, in spite of their faults, have given up all temporal happiness and peace, wealth, life for the sake of justice, righteousness and truth. ⁽⁴⁵⁾

But now a sinister fundamentalism had begun to creep in that was wholly puritanical and, while proclaiming themselves as Church Militants, a reference to the zealous Jesuits in counter-reformation Spain, the WSPU systematically set about isolating the fragile support many churchgoers felt able to give to the movement. From the middle of 1913 onwards the WSPU, under the direction of Christabel in Paris, were increasingly determined to divorce themselves from individual men or male organisations, and this, by default of course, meant the church. Christabel believed, "Women would become conscious of their own worth only through independence from men," ⁽⁴⁶⁾ and this was the most important plank in Christabel's policies during the latter years of militancy. In contrast, during the WSPU's early years, many Church leaders openly supported Christabel Pankhurst's line on male chastity, and welcomed, at first, the debate the Great Scourge would bring. Even while disputing her figures, " they still lauded her stance on the white-slave trade, a euphemism for prostitution, and the economic and social deprivation that many women, and especially working women, suffered at the hands of

* Unfortunately, nothing else is known about this woman. She is only known from this letter.

** She wrote in the *Suffragette* on 1 August 1913 that around 75 to 80% of all men had been infected with venereal disease before marriage.

men. As Rosen confirmed in *Rise Up Women*, many leading clergy praised her for “her magnificent courage in fighting the hideous monster of sexual depravity and disease.” ⁽⁴⁷⁾

In many ways, Christabel Pankhurst was engaging herself in the debate and campaigns that focused around sexual morality that were developed in order to define femininity, sex and morality in relation to political activity. To this end, Christabel sought to treat what she saw as a conspiracy of silence regarding the transmission of venereal disease amongst women. By linking VD as the cause of physical, mental and moral degeneracy which in turn resulted in race suicide, she condemned men in general and vindicated the purity of women by shifting the blame of racial degeneracy from women to men. For Christabel Pankhurst, it was important to show that men themselves were responsible for the nation’s poor health.

By doing this, Christabel, in line with other feminists at this time, constructed a framework in which to understand women’s subordinate position within society and, more importantly, the means for its eradication. As Lucy Bland has noted in *Banishing the Beast*,

Feminists drew on the ideology of female moral superiority and altruistic maternity to claim a subject position from which to enter the public world as moral missionaries and to insist... on a right to political status. ⁽⁴⁸⁾

But now Christabel sought to eradicate women’s subordinate position by taking the debate a step forward and challenged the belief that women were not disadvantaged by nature, but by a predominately male culture. Now, in the interest of notoriety and publicity, she went further and advocated not only complete forced male chastity, but also a complete break from all male organisations, especially the Church. Although she may have blamed male culture within the Church for women’s inferiority, she nevertheless drew upon the language and imagery of that culture for attacking, perhaps, the only male organisation which gave women a voice ⁽⁴⁹⁾ Using religious terminology, in her “Appeal To God,” she attacked the notion that, despite the fact that many of the “finest among the

clergy” were supportive of the women in their noble crusade, the Church on the whole was not, and had

failed the nation in a great crisis- forgetting that its own seed was the blood of the martyrs, it has no pity for the martyrs of the present day. ⁽⁵⁰⁾

In some respects, she had been right, as many Church leaders had been more than willing to support the women and their cause, and were equally indignant at the use of force-feeding and the subsequent Cat and Mouse Act.* In Lincolnshire, for instance, prompted by the Nottingham WSPU, even the Bishop of Lincoln made clear his feelings on the matter when he published a letter in *The Times*, which read,

Methods of repression and expedients like the Cat and Mouse Act would deserve only ridicule, were it not for the suffering they involve. The only sane and lasting remedy for the present discontents is truly Liberal legislation; that is the extension of liberty through the franchise. ⁽⁵¹⁾

In Leicester, the support was much the same and the Reverend Donaldson, before taking up the post at Westminster Abbey, had long championed and supported women's rights by sharing, shoulder to shoulder, the platforms of both the WSPU and the NUWSS, and likewise protested and condemned the Government in its actions. As a committed socialist and Christian, he had often talked about the stress and poverty low wages caused for women, and as a result, had been much interested in the formation of the WSPU in Leicester. Attracted to the ideals and direction Alice Hawkins gave to the branch, he supported the movement as much as possible and often allowed his church rooms to be used by the WSPU. ⁽⁵²⁾

Within the local WSPU itself, Church support was paramount, as many local women were active in Church matters as well as the militant campaign. Not only that, but Church

* The Cat and Mouse Act, or the Prisoners Temporary Discharge for Ill Health Act, 1913, authorised the release of prisoners who had become ill due to hunger striking. However, once better, they were subject to rearrest.

activists were also militants and many formed their own organisation to campaign for the vote alongside of the WSPU. And, without doubt, some of these Church organisations did much in the way of keeping religious bodies on board. In Nottingham, for example, one such organisation, the Church League for Women's Suffrage, did more than most. Almost from its inception, the league helped to alleviate any reservations the Church might have held regarding militancy. Even as late as October 1913, the Nottingham branch of the Church League continued to support the militant tactics, as one of their leaders, the Reverend E Gordon, confirmed when he said,

Those that stood back because some persons were breaking the law and using violence were very far from realising the deep necessity that the franchise should be extended to women, and the tremendous results that would occur to the life of the nation. ⁽⁵³⁾

At one point, so important was this group in Nottingham that Christabel Pankhurst herself felt compelled to address the local branch in October 1911.⁽⁵⁴⁾ In some respects, this underlies the interwoven politics of the time, and in Nottingham, certainly, many WSPU members like Elsa Oswald, Mrs Denman and many others were members of both organisations and presented the suffragettes as "Christian soldiers fighting with the sword of spirit." ⁽⁵⁵⁾ Indeed, Mrs Bramwell Booth, wife of the Nottingham-born Salvation Army General, and other prominent Church leaders attempted to create an atmosphere of conciliation by arranging suffrage services in Westminster Abbey and St Paul's.

In Leicester and Northampton on the other hand, the link between Church and WSPU was less easy to define, and as far as it can be seen, beyond the normal religious practice of the time, little contact was made between Church and them. In Northampton, little evidence survives to suggest that the local women ever used religious terminology in their speeches. Instead, they appeared to concentrate their energies on demanding the vote in the political arena, focusing on the social and economical, rather than the spiritual. Like Leicester, the Northampton women appeared totally indifferent to the religious diatribe spoken elsewhere. Of course, like Nottingham, they concerned themselves with

Christabel Pankhurst's Moral Crusade and spoke out in favour of the *Great Scourge*, but their concern was mainly directed at the plight of women, rather than targeting the double standards of men, as one Northampton member, Miss Oakley, said in the spring of 1914,

The root cause of all evil is not only the double standards of morality for men and women, but also the subjection and under-payment of women.

(56)

Yet here was the paradox. While the WSPU was actively seeking the support of the Church of England, and other free churches, within the East Midlands, at least, the national leadership undertook a two-pronged offensive against the national Church body, and not only attacked church leaders verbally, but also began a campaign of church disruption that resulted in the destruction of some churches by fire. Yet, despite the impending split, the schism between the Church and the militant suffragettes was slow to materialise in the East Midlands, and in Nottingham local members continued to see themselves as part of a wider moral crusade that included the Church as well. But the wind of change was well observed when the Nottingham WSPU, at the insistence of Charlotte Marsh, withdrew all financial support from church causes.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The extent to which this was national policy is hard to determine, as no reference was made to this strategy in either Leicester or Northampton. Nor were church attacks commonplace in these two towns. However, in Northampton, St Peters Church was singled out for attention. In May 1914, the church was entered and WSPU leaflets were scattered.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Typically of the Northampton suffragettes, no damage was inflicted and the extent of the militant action appeared to have been a quite harmless piece of propaganda, yet Nottingham, on the other hand, excelled in all aspects of this church campaign.

At first, according to Sylvia Pankhurst,⁽⁵⁹⁾ the policy of disrupting church services was begun as a protest against the Cat and Mouse Act, but was later extended to include chanting of prayers for hunger-strikers at churches around the country, the first of which was carried out in St Paul's in London in August 1913, when a group of women, in time with the litany chant, sang out, "Save Emmeline Pankhurst, save her, save her." At this

stage, the manner of the protest was something of a novelty, and although the police were called, the women were not ejected. However, as the protests increased and they lost their novel appeal, the mood of the congregations changed, and women were physically attacked.

In Nottingham, the church protests began around three months later, when five local suffragettes interrupted the main service in St Mary's Church, Nottingham by chanting in time to the religious litany, "Oh God save Annie Kenney, Sylvia Pankhurst and all the women who are persecuted and suffer imprisonment for conscience sake. Amen."⁽⁶⁰⁾ Over the next few months to June 1914, the Nottingham WSPU were to interrupt church services another eight or nine times. However, in June 1914, the Nottingham suffragettes went to their most extreme and gutted All Saints church in Breadsall with a large conflagration that appalled and shocked the congregation. Almost all the interior of the 13th-century church was destroyed. * Unrepentant, the WSPU delivered a letter to the vicar, the Reverend Whitaker, the following day in a green envelope, which said,

Let there be light

The price of Liberty.

Votes For Women.

The message we left

Must have been burnt.

A year ago.

A reference to Emily Wilde Davison.⁽⁶¹⁾

However, the destruction of the church in Breadsall strained the relationship between the

* According to documents held at the church, it is believed that the fire was started by Alice Wheeldon, aged 47 and her daughter Hetty Wheeldon, who both later confessed after the campaign was wound up. However, there is also circumstantial evidence that they were assisted by Irene Casey. According to the *Nottingham Daily Express* (3 July 1914), when she was arrested in Nottingham a month later, police found in her possession a 20ft fuse, a detonator, 5lbs of cheddite, two fire lighters, a small bottle of benzine, two boxes of matches, a glass cutter, a pair of pliers and a book on Nottingham churches, including one relating to Breadsall. There is also an interesting footnote pertaining to Alice Wheeldon. In 1917, both she and her daughter Hetty Wheeldon were arrested and charged with attempting to assassinate the Prime Minister, Lloyd George.

Nottingham WSPU and the local church community almost to breaking-point, and when, ten days later, they attempted to interrupt a service for the sick in St Mary's, Nottingham, they were violently thrown out. The following evening, several windows in the WSPU office in Derby Road were smashed for the second time in a week.⁽⁶²⁾ The tolerance many church-goers had displayed over the previous twelve months had evaporated, and with it went any hopes the WSPU may have had of claiming the moral high ground. It is hard from this



Breadsall Church.
Source. Zoe Oughton.

distance to fully understand and appreciate the damage Christabel's policies had on the movement as a whole, but the experience of the women in the East Midlands serves to demonstrate that support and sympathy had all but melted away. In any propaganda war between the WSPU and the Government, the women had lost the day, and any repressive moves made against the WSPU were to be applauded by the general public. Throughout the country, women and suffragette shops were attacked and damaged with little comment. Christabel had charted the WSPU on a course that would sink the cause.

The Government's reaction to the new outbreak of vandalism at the beginning of 1912 when it came in April 1913, was forceful and calculated and, within a short space of time offices of both the national headquarters of the WSPU in their new premises at Lincoln's Inn House and *The Suffragette* were raided and over one hundred and twenty women were arrested.⁽⁶³⁾ For their part, Mrs Pankhurst and the Pethick-Lawrences were arrested on charges of incitement and were consequently tried. Without doubt, this was a serious attempt by the Government to 'choke off' the national movement from its leaders, while doing their utmost to scatter and suppress the movement around the country. It was only fate that Christabel Pankhurst was not in the office at the time and was able to escape to

Paris dressed as a nurse. As Christabel Pankhurst later recalled, the arrests and the confiscation of press copy was a great blow and for a time the paper looked unable to continue, but later, *The Suffragette* was able to continue, albeit at a reduced level. Interestingly enough, when the paper looked in danger of closing down, Ramsay MacDonald and Keir Hardie, in the interests of free speech,⁽⁶⁴⁾ offered to take over the publication of *The Suffragette*. However the offer was rejected outright by a fiercely independent Lincoln's Inn House.

In other ways too, the increasing militancy and growing political isolation of Christabel towards the end of 1912 and the early part of 1913 had other far-reaching effects that were hard to see at the time, but in both towns, the Leicester and Nottingham branches undertook a new policy of recruiting working women into the movement. Clearly this course of action was a complete antithesis of what Christabel was preaching at the time and needs to be understood in the light of what was happening in London, and especially the by-election in Bromley and Bow. At the end of 1912 the Labour MP, George Lansbury, resigned his seat and fought a by-election on the single issue of women's suffrage. Gripped by the possibility of a major coup should he win, the WSPU threw all their weight behind the campaign. However, the campaign was overshadowed by the accusation that the WSPU had long ceased to be concerned with the goals and ambitions of the thousands of working women living in the East End. Of course, on the face of it, the Union had always maintained that it sought to appeal to women of all social classes and denied the existence of any formal discrimination amongst its ranks.

But, as Sylvia Pankhurst pointed out in her book,⁽⁶⁵⁾ the WSPU had largely ignored the working-class and this fundamental antagonism was on open display in the Bromley and Bow election campaign. Throughout the East End many Labour supporters, with some justification, decried the WSPU as a middle-class organisation that was only interested in a "Ladies' vote".⁽⁶⁶⁾ Chided by these accusations, the WSPU decided to undertake a programme of damage limitation and sought to dovetail the hopes and aspirations of working women into the Union's political agenda. As Flora Drummond proclaimed in *The Suffragette* in November 1912,

The enemies of 'votes for women' are saying that the suffragette movement is a movement of rich women and women workers are taking no real part in it. The truth was that the three main objectives of the suffragette campaign were to end sweating of women workers which was undermining the health of the mothers of the race and driving thousands to a life of shame; to put a stop to the White Slave Traffic,.... and to prevent 'the outrages committed upon little girls, some of them only babies'. ⁽⁶⁷⁾

In line with this re-emphasis of WSPU policy, by 27 December, Christabel had shifted her position somewhat and was now proclaiming that,

The WSPU acts upon the belief that the working woman, with her more subtle mind, finer intuitions, and greater knowledge of human nature, is already a more valuable citizen and more qualified for political leadership than are many male Labour leaders. ⁽⁶⁸⁾

Consequently, it was for no other reason than to answer their critics that the WSPU began to encourage membership amongst the working women of the East Midlands. To this end, instructions were sent out to all the branches to begin a recruitment drive that was to correspond with Flora Drummond's call for three hundred working women to put their case before Lloyd George early in 1913. In Northampton a complete turnabout occurred and Mabel Crockett put pen to paper and wrote to the *Northampton Mercury* demanding that working women be included in the franchise. Clearly she was acting under instruction from WSPU HQ in Lincoln's Inn House, for, before this she had been opposed to such a measure. ⁽⁶⁹⁾

In Leicester, Alice Hawkins jumped at the chance and went to London to represent the Women's Boot and Shoe Union. She was more than eager at this time to demonstrate that the WSPU was not an organisation entirely of rich women, but that working women were also involved. With some passion, she also pointed out to Lloyd George that her two

sons, one in the Navy, the other in the Army had the vote, yet the woman who brought them into the world had no say, and was “looked down on.”⁽⁷⁰⁾ In spite of the impassioned pleas by some of the women, Lloyd George would not commit himself and the deputation remained in London to prepare for any action that might follow. In the end, the delegates achieved very little in real terms and its rejection outside the House of Commons on a wet and windy Tuesday evening heralded a period of window smashing on larger shops and Government property.⁽⁷¹⁾

At first, Flora Drummond’s stance appealed directly to the working-class women within the WSPU because it allowed women to escape the role of victims and become mistresses of their own destiny within an economic context. Consequently the vote became a holy grail by which women could readjust their economic position within the workplace and compete with men on a more equal basis. Of course, the subordinate sexual position of women was often linked to the inferior economic position of women, and almost from its inception, the WSPU’s hidden agenda had been a response to the appalling poverty suffered by many women. In Leicester, Nottingham and, to a lesser extent, Northampton, this anxiety had been around for some time and had found its expression in socialism and a widespread belief that Britain was gripped not only in moral decline, but also in racial degeneration. This fear of racial degeneration was nothing new and had been around since Booth conducted his famous survey into the conditions of the London poor.

However, in Leicester, ‘Lydia’ made much use of her column in *The Pioneer*⁽⁷²⁾ to highlight this very problem and consistently argued that society ignored the welfare of women and children at their peril. For her, the issues were clear, the degraded economic condition of women was a terrible indictment of capitalism on working women. While men, through the activities of trade unionism, were able to improve their lot, women, by being in direct competition with men, consistently failed to benefit from protective legislation. Either they were legislated out of the workplace or, as Helen Hacker pointed out in *Women as a Minority Group*,⁽⁷³⁾ men were quick to perceive them as a rival group and make use of economic, legal and ideological weapons to eliminate or reduce their competition, as was the case in Nottingham. Consequently, as Kate Millett has quite

rightly pointed out in *Sexual Politics*, ⁽⁷⁴⁾ while some women and children undoubtedly benefited from the mass of Government-sponsored social reforms that curbed the excesses of laissez-faire, men prospered more from this type of state intervention and as a result consistently showed little or no interest in organising women within the Labour movement.

This lack of action by male trade unionists was the nub of the problem, and while in Leicester and Northampton the long tradition of female labour in the local factories and workshops gave them a measure of independence and a relatively higher wage, they still smarted at their menfolk's inaction. However, this was not to be the case in and around Northampton after 1911. As it has already been pointed out in Chapter 5, the men within the NUBSO actively sought to incorporate women's low pay into official union policy throughout this later period. But it was only as a direct response to the women's breakaway union in Leicester, that local Boot and Shoe Union officials sought, with some success, to incorporate the local women into an organised trade union and fought for the principle of a minimum wage for all women workers. As one male leader, without a backward glance to the previous policy of the Union, commented to a meeting some time later,

By the help and the loyalty of the women, in a short time wages shall be considerably higher than they were twenty years ago. ⁽⁷⁵⁾

This commitment to women's issues is the key to understanding not only why Northampton women refused to become militant at the beginning of 1912, but also why Alice Hawkins could not export her new trade union to Northamptonshire. Of course the situation within Northampton was not the norm, and indeed, it went against much of the experience of other women around the East Midlands, but without doubt, the new women's union in Leicester, created by Alice Hawkins and Lizzie Willson, had something to with the unique situation of the area.

Everywhere else though, the problems of women were very real indeed, and as Juliet

Mitchell quite rightly pointed out, ⁽⁷⁶⁾ the early radical feminists attempted to solve the problem of economic and social oppression by making their inferior position the “problem” and balked against the male ideology that oppressed them at work and attempted to relegate them to a world of domestic chores. As a result, women of all social classes within the WSPU attacked the male concept that biological differences between the sexes were a major part in the division of labour within the industrial sphere. No longer would they accept that their “psycho-biological metabolism” ⁽⁷⁷⁾ would render them a less useful member of the workforce. They now openly attacked the underlying assumption that a woman’s place within the workplace was determined by her incapacity for demanding, physical work and argued that the established domestic sphere espoused by Ruskin that “the power of women is to rule at home,” ⁽⁷⁸⁾ only sought to hide their subservience in the means of production. Indeed, as Mabel Crockett asked,

What would happen if, in protest, the whole of the women workers were to return to the home and engage themselves in domestic affairs of the home? It would mean a complete dislocation of the industrial world. Therefore, for protection’s sake, the women demand the franchise. ⁽⁷⁹⁾

Instead, women like Lydia in the *The Pioneer* argued, as early as 1902, that the image of the “true woman” and the “true family” conjured up harmony and love that often hid the true picture of violence and despair and that any analysis of women’s condition must take this into account. ⁽⁸⁰⁾

Of course Lydia and others like her, notably Helen Watts in Nottingham, were not attacking the concept of the family; that particular debate was yet to come. Instead, while insisting that the family was the cornerstone of society and therefore should be protected at all costs, the “all costs” did not include the subjection of women in it. As Helen Watts said in 1909,

The love of home is one of our strongest motives of action.....The sweating evil, intemperance, bad housing and many other miserable

conditions in England today are among the evils with which women are called to contend for the sake of home.⁽⁸¹⁾

Instead they took a more complex argument which suggested that the health of the family rested on the physical health of the wife or mother. While more often than not, the home was a place of rest and recuperation for husbands and children, the home was no "pedestal of ease" for working-class women.⁽⁸²⁾ For in a large majority of cases, the wife became the slave without whose labour the whole structure of the family would collapse. As Margery Spring - Rice later maintained,

Upon the survival of the mother depends the growth and care of the family, and a high rate of maternal mortality threatens in more ways than one the very existence of the race.⁽⁸³⁾

III

Further to this, changes were being made elsewhere that only increased the isolation of the WSPU at a local level. For instance, in the north, Lancashire cotton-mill workers and the North of England Society, a constitutional suffrage organisation, had, through constant pressure at TUC and ILP Conferences, succeeded in shifting the ILP towards supporting votes for women. As a result, between 1912 and 1914, the Miners' Federation reversed its long-held objections to female suffrage and threw its considerable weight into the fight.⁽⁸⁴⁾ This was a major shift of policy and in 1913 the Labour Party Conference tied itself, by a nearly two to one vote, to a motion committing members to oppose any franchise bill that excluded women. Not only that, but this alliance was further strengthened by the announcement of the NUWSS that they would seek electoral co-operation with Labour. Under the direction of Catherine Marshall, money and skilled organisers were offered to the Labour Party to oppose anti-suffrage Liberal members at by-elections.⁽⁸⁵⁾ This was a significant change in the fortunes of the suffrage campaign and the WSPU, now out of step with the wider campaign, was in a poor position to take advantage of this shift in ILP policy. As Liddington and Norris point out, it was truly

ironical that, as the suffragists had slowly moved nearer to the Labour Party, so the WSPU moved away. ⁽⁸⁶⁾

In Nottingham, the relationship between the Labour Movement and the WSPU had always been fraught with either misunderstanding or, on the part of the women within the WSPU, disinterest. Throughout its short history, the Nottingham WSPU consistently ignored local politics to the extent that it was often conspicuous by its absence within the local press. ⁽⁸⁷⁾ In some ways the Nottingham WSPU damaged its own position by the fact that it was often seen to be aloof and uninterested in working women's concerns. This stance was duly noted by working women when the Nottingham WSPU declined to join the Advisory Board, set up by the Women's Trade Union League, the Women's Co-op Guild, the Women's Railway Guild, the Women's Labour League, and the Federation of Women Workers in March 1912, ⁽⁸⁸⁾ to campaign against the introduction of Lloyd George's Insurance Act. This was a serious mistake and left Charlotte Marsh with no credible credentials when she approached the Trades' Council in July 1913 ⁽⁸⁹⁾ asking for support in condemning the Cat and Mouse Act. Passing a rejection of the WSPU motion by a large majority, the secretary, Mr G Thundercliff, commented that they had other, more important subjects to discuss. * The anti-Insurance Act campaign was a major issue in Nottingham amongst the women working in the hosiery industry. At one point, a local company, *Dould and Company* issued notice to 300 female workers unless they were prepared to pay the sixpence required by the employer. Although this was contrary to the principle of the act, it was not illegal. ⁽⁹⁰⁾

In contrast, the opposite was certainly true in Northampton. When faced with seeking support against the Cat and Mouse Act, the Northampton Trades' Council were only more than willing to help. ⁽⁹¹⁾ Indeed, this help passed beyond the passive support other trades councils offered into active support. For them, matters had come to a head when the local WSPU attempted to hold a protest meeting in the market place on a Friday evening in

* They were not without some sympathy and support, as one man said in their defence, "If the working class had acted like the militants, then they might be better off". Trades' Council Minutes, quoted in the *Nottingham Guardian*, 17 July 1913.

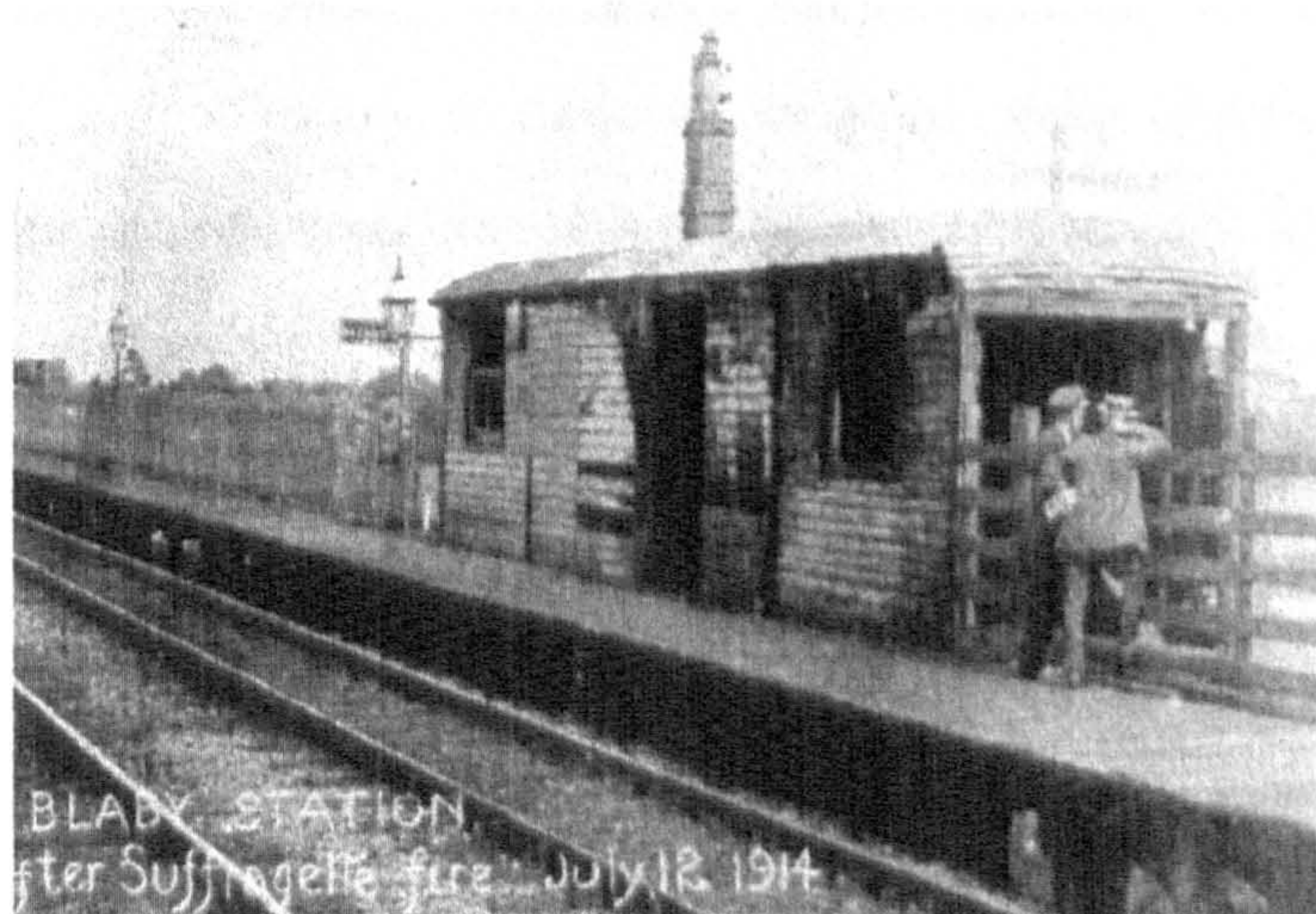
August 1913. As in other towns, the meeting attracted the local troublemakers and broke up in confusion and scuffles. Incensed by the lack of action taken by the police, the Trades' Council condemned in the highest terms their non-intervention at the outbreak of violence.⁽⁹²⁾ On the suggestion of Alderman Pitts, a letter of censure was written and sent to the local Watch Committee. In other towns this show of solidarity would have been enough, but the Trades' Council organised a second public meeting in the market in which they protested against the Cat and Mouse Act on behalf of the women. As one member, Mr Roberts, said, "The actions of these women is a lesson to trade unionists to show the same enthusiasm, self sacrifice and endeavour."⁽⁹³⁾

This show of support was almost unheard of in other parts of the East Midlands, given the reactions of both the Leicester and Nottingham councils to the outbreak of militancy and the hostility between the WSPU and the Labour movement. Without doubt, other factors were at work in Northampton that were not evident elsewhere and the disparity between Northampton and the rest of the country lies in the cold reality that the local branch never fully endorsed the militant actions of the wider organisation. Another reason might well have been the fact that Northampton was somewhat smaller than the other two towns and personal relationships were more intimate. Indeed, Mrs Croft's husband was also a member of the Trades' Council and was appointed local organiser of the fledgling Labour Party.⁽⁹⁴⁾ Without doubt, up to a point, he supported his wife's action and even bragged in the Council chamber that his wife had thrown a stone through a Home Office window.⁽⁹⁵⁾ This, no doubt appealed to his radical sense of humour, but it would have been a different matter had his wife committed acts of arson and vandalism.

To the North, the effects of Christabel Pankhurst's policy were all too clear in Leicester. From the outset of renewed militancy, members of the local Labour Party were provided with an ideal excuse to dissociate themselves from what had become an embarrassment. As Rowbotham pointed out, men like this were obviously relieved to be let off the hook and "remained self-righteous in the face of renewed pressure."⁽⁹⁶⁾ Indeed, MacDonald told Alice Hawkins, Mrs Iondies, Mrs Lowe, Mrs Goodliffe and Gladys Hazel at his surgery in St Marks church on Belgrave Road in 1912, that theirs was an organisation



Blaby Railway station before the First World War.



The waiting room after it was destroyed by Kitty Marion and Helen Sheriff.
Source, Brian Lund.

that “only spoke for a small section of women suffragists and had declared war on the Labour Party.”⁽⁹⁷⁾ He had been deeply outraged by the increasing acts of arson and vandalism and by June 1913 he wrote a leader for the *Daily Chronicle*, condemning what he saw as a “pettifogging” movement led by middle-class women, who in no way represented the minds or manners of the great mass of working women, “whose well-being was cruelly sacrificed.”⁽⁹⁸⁾

In some ways this observation appeared quite true for not all women trade unionists could

link, as Alice Hawkins had done, the vote with the economic side of the women's question. Many trade unionists at this time argued that a mixture of the two could hinder any chances of success in Labour legislation. Thus when MacDonald said that he welcomed the WSPU's attempts to hinder Labour, he saw this as a "blessing" that would only lead to their removal from sensible debate "and that is the best thing that can happen to women's suffrage." ⁽⁹⁹⁾

Clearly there was now no love lost between the two factions and the WSPU retaliated by heckling Ramsay MacDonald in the De Montfort Hall three times in as many weeks in 1914. ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ However, this only served to show the extent to which the WSPU had been isolated within the wider political community and although Miss Elizabeth Grew was received with all due respect when offered an opportunity to speak at one such meeting, she had all but lost the debate. Indeed, and despite the fact that the WSPU was never a favourite of the *Leicester Mercury*, it came in for some sharp criticism when their editorial wrote "The interruptions are doing damage to the very cause they are presumably desirous of serving." ⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Instead, the leader continued to argue that the militancy displayed in the De Montfort Hall would never secure the franchise and would only strengthen the hands of those who contended that women's suffrage would be a blunder. In some respects this point of view is not hard to understand. * Indeed, it was not only members of the Labour left who felt disquiet at Christabel's actions, as H W Nevinson wrote in his journal, it is "now going to pieces through one young woman's simple mistake." ⁽¹⁰²⁾

However, condemnation by the press fuelled more violent forms of reaction and over the next few months an arson campaign was carried out around Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire with three empty mansion houses being targeted, the Red House in Burton Walk, Loughborough on 19 October 1913, ⁽¹⁰³⁾ Stoughton Hall in May 1914 and Neville Holt Mansion near Market Harborough in May 1914. ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ However, all three

* According to the *Suffragette* (20 March 1914), one action that enraged local ILP members was the unveiling of a socialist flag stained with black ink with the shout that "Your flag is stained with dishonour". This so enraged the men that the meeting was suspended for 15 minutes while the women were ejected.

attempts failed to take hold, and as a result Gladys Hazel and Margaret West applied to Lincoln's Inn House for the expertise of a professional arsonist like Kitty Marion. As Sylvia Pankhurst explained,

Certain officials of the Union were given, as their main work, the task of advising incendiaries, and arranging for the supply of such inflammable materials..... and other such matters as they might require. ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾

Kitty Marion arrived in Leicester in early June and began to instruct the branch in urban warfare with the result that in July 1914 she and Helen Sheriff, ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ armed with wood shavings dipped in creosol and an axe to break in, trekked across a field in the middle of the night and managed to burn down Blaby railway station, causing £500 worth of damage. ⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

In Nottingham, they had much more success and in the space of eighteen months managed to cause £42,000 worth of damage with attacks on the Dutch barn at Bulcote and a fire at a local boot and shoe warehouse. ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ Not only that, but they attacked the very bastions of male pride and authority when they burnt down the Nottingham Boat House in May 1913. ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ In a letter, later sent to the club secretary Mr Edwards, something of their attitude to arson can be gleaned, when a member wrote,

Of course we could not help being sorry for the poor boats, but you understand, don't you? We can't possibly let any property be safe so long as we haven't votes. Please don't be angry with us for what we've done - it isn't any use - but be thankful that we haven't gone further. If we had been men, life would have been taken ages ago and we will spare this, but nothing else. Of course, you know how to stop this sort of thing. If not, allow me to tell you, induce the government to bring in a bill giving women equal voting rights with men, instead of wasting their time on the useless Cat and Mouse Bill. ⁽¹¹⁰⁾

If the WSPU failed to impress the leaders of the ILP, then so too did the Labour Party fail to impress upon the Leicester WSPU that its policy of aggression would destroy any vestige of credibility it might have earned. The branch had changed too much for this type of appeal to work. By 1914 the branch was peopled by younger, radical women from the new lower middle-classes, like schoolteachers and nurses. They saw their struggle for the vote in terms of a sex war against all men rather than a class conflict. It might well be argued with some justification that under the dictatorial leadership of Christabel Pankhurst in Paris the campaign had become too narrow in its outlook and too divorced from local working-class politics that might have lent it the broad popular base it needed. As Rosen pointed out in *Rise Up Women*,

The tactics of attacking empty houses and golf links was not bothersome enough to create a crisis of magnitude sufficient to bring about a passing of women's measure.⁽¹¹⁾

Instead, the experience of the Leicester branch demonstrated quite clearly that it only sought to alienate those within the Labour movement who might have helped. The tactics of the revolutionary were all but lost on many local socialists who were anxious to demonstrate their respectability. Consequently, and considering the Leicester WSPU's formation owed much to its Labour origins, the Labour Party had little effect on the local leadership and could do little to prevent the outbreak of militancy in Leicester.

Almost from the declaration by Mrs Pankhurst in March 1912, the local union began to sign up volunteers to undertake what was referred to as danger duty, like Violet Doudney, a twenty-three-year-old nurse from Stoney Stanton, who received two months hard labour in July 1912 for breaking windows in the Home Secretary's office during a WSPU demonstration.* In the end the commitment to the Pankhursts was too strong, thus when a concerted letter-box attack was instigated across the country, letterboxes in Eastgates, Humberstone Road, Rutland Street and Newark Street in the town centre

* She told the magistrate, "I broke the window as a protest against the inhuman treatment of suffragist prisoners, and to take my part in the agitation. I am not sorry, on the contrary, as an English woman, I am proud to stand here today". (*Leicester Chronicle* 6 July 1912.)

received attention. In this respect, it is important to point out that these attacks were not merely copycat attacks* but part of Christabel Pankhurst's plan of action that was to "strike a blow at civilisation from within."⁽¹¹²⁾ This synchronised method of attack was more fully demonstrated only a couple of months later, when one Friday night in February 1913, sixteen golf courses across the country were simultaneously attacked and defaced. In Leicester, the Leicester Golf Course on Stoughton Drive was targeted to great effect and beside lighting a bonfire on the green the message, "No Votes, No Golf" was etched into the turf. Coincidentally, one young radical, Miss Elizabeth Frisby, only lived around the corner and her father was a member of the Club.⁽¹¹³⁾ In Nottingham, however, an attack on Bulwell Forest links was foiled by mounted police who chased two women off. Nevertheless, the following month they more than made up for this failure when they attacked a cricket pavilion and smashed several lamps and fittings.⁽¹¹⁴⁾

In Leicester, again due to Christabel Pankhurst's policy, over the following months, not only were shop windows attacked in Market Street,⁽¹¹⁵⁾ causing several hundred pounds worth of damage, but telephone wires were again cut in the Stoughton Road⁽¹¹⁶⁾ area: unfortunately for the group, however, these actions had almost the reverse effect from that intended. It is obvious that the WSPU had greatly misread the feeling and sentiments on a local level. It never occurred to the membership that by attacking predominantly middle-class targets they would lose the support of working men and women. Yet that is exactly what happened; reactions to such events lost, rather than won support and even though it was always a risky business to hold public meetings in the marketplace, by 1913 the suffragettes had been physically assaulted on a number of occasions and their shop in Bowling Green Street sustained on one occasion broken windows.⁽¹¹⁷⁾

So dangerous had public speaking become for these women, that the Leicester Watch Committee⁽¹¹⁸⁾ requested that the WSPU refrain from further public meetings.

* This was not entirely true. In both Nottingham and Leicester there were copycat attacks on pillar boxes by impressionable youngsters. In Leicester Charles Garrets, a boot boy from the George Hotel, ruined letters in East Gates and the High Street. He claimed in court that he got the idea from a suffragette meeting he had attended. In Nottingham, on the other hand, in October 1912, a 16-year-old girl, Beatrice Jarman of Stanley Street, Newark, was bound over for good behaviour for 12 months for attempting to set fire to a letterbox on the corner of her street. She claimed she was a suffragette.

Predictably, Alice Hawkins refused and under the watchful eye of the police continued to speak in the marketplace and hold parades around the town. It was also suggested by the *Leicester Mercury* that the second wave of letterbox attacks around the town centre in May 1913 ⁽¹¹⁹⁾ was a direct response to Alice Hawkins and her daughter being attacked by an angry mob in the marketplace. However, the extent to which this accusation stands is now impossible to say, but some time later Alice Hawkins was arrested for damaging the Royal Mail with Brunswick black. ⁽¹²⁰⁾ She pleaded guilty and was sent to prison for seven days. In her defence she claimed it was a political offence and refused to take food. But primarily due to failing health and a request by her close family, she declined to hunger-strike and was spared the indignity of being force-fed.

By 1914, the policy of using violence for a constitutional end, introduced by Christabel Pankhurst in 1912, had completely reversed all the good the WSPU had done for women's suffrage. The tactics employed by the WSPU since the departure of the Pethick-Lawrences had little effect in bringing about a Liberal reassessment of policy, and had done much to destroy "most of those WSPU members and sympathisers who possessed some intellectual independence and critical faculty of their own." ⁽¹²¹⁾ Without doubt, the arson campaign did more harm than good and instead of recruiting sympathetic politicians and people of influence into the movement, it did much to facilitate a decline in public support. Militancy had become, not so much a measure forced upon them by Asquith's intransigence, but more an expression of Christabel Pankhurst's right to rule in exile. In Paris, her enforced isolation led her to believe that they were being denied the vote by a Government out of step with public opinion. Although that may have once been the case, by 1914 it was a complete delusion. Unfortunately, these feminists tended to imagine that there could be changes in a woman's position in a capitalist system without either transforming the outer world of production or the inner world of the family or their sexual status. ⁽¹²²⁾

In many respects this was as true of Leicester as elsewhere, and the evidence suggests that having initially built an organisation with a broad popular base, the Pankhursts rejected its working-class foundation and replaced it with a narrow, insular clique of

middle-class women, who were, by and large, out of touch with the realities of working-class life. As Kate Millett ⁽¹²³⁾ argued, the WSPU's ability to limit what was to all intents and purposes a social revolution to one burning issue was a "great fault." ⁽¹²⁴⁾ Of course, it is true to say that Alice Hawkins and a few other working-class women remained, but the policies of the national leadership had consistently cut off the WSPU from its best supporters. Instead, a majority of these women returned to the NUWSS and the WFL when a reassessment of the Labour Party's position was made clear.

However, as Mitchell argued, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst did not think in terms of building a mass organisation or of mobilising the dissatisfaction amongst working women, and although it rendered the WSPU ineffective in Leicester and elsewhere as a viable political organisation, it did make the issue of votes for women one of burning importance in Edwardian Britain. There was a price to pay, however, "and once they had adopted militant tactics, the choices closed in on them" ⁽¹²⁵⁾ and the acts of militancy appeared to take on a logic of their own. As a consequence, it was the outbreak of war in 1914 that undoubtedly prevented the further use of arson in Nottingham and Leicester. As Kitty Marion later recalled,

I was on danger duty in Leicester, ready to send another reminder to the Government....., when a telegram arrived from headquarters, to stop all activity. ⁽¹²⁶⁾

Almost as soon as war broke out, and without a backward glance, the Pankhursts immediately wound up all groups within the East Midlands and called their members to turn their attention to matters of war and empire.

CHAPTER SIX

The Return To Militancy and Its Political, Economical and Social Consequences

- (1) Ramsay MacDonald made this position more than clear when he addressed Christabel Pankhurst in a letter. Quoted in Leicester Mercury, 25 October 1912.
- (2) Andrew Rosen, Rise Up Women, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p. 121.
- (3) The Pioneer, 24 June 1911.
- (4) Leicester Daily Post, 5 February 1909.
- (5) David Mitchell, Queen Christabel, London, MacDonald, 1977, p.174.
- (6) Ibid, p.174.
- (7) Nottingham Daily Express, 22 January 1913.
- (8) Leicester Mercury, 14 December 1912.
- (9) Ibid.
- (10) Nottingham Daily Express, 10 December 1912.
- (11) David Mitchell, Queen Christabel, London, MacDonald, 1977, p.176.
- (12) Votes For Women, 1 March 1912.
- (13) Ibid.
- (14) Northampton Mercury, 10 February 1912.
- (15) Northamptonshire Kelly's Directory.
- (16) Minutes of Foreman's Association, quoted in Northampton Daily Chronicle, 14 August 1911.
- (17) Northampton Mercury, 22 December 1911.
- (18) Northampton Mercury, 9 February 1912.
- (19) Letter published in the Northampton Daily Chronicle, 6 March 1912.
- (20) Northampton Mercury, 9 February 1912.

- (21) Northampton Daily Chronicle, 10 February 1912.
- (22) Northampton Mercury, 14 March 1913.
- (23) Ed, J Marcus, Suffrage And The Pankhursts, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, p. 45.
- (24) Daily Mail, 4 March 1911.
- (25) Dame Christabel Pankhurst, Unshackled: The Story Of How We Won The Vote, London, Hutchinson, 1959, p. 202.
- (26) Antonia Raeburn, The Militant Suffragette, Newton Abbot, Michael Joseph, 1974, p. 166.
- (27) Emmeline Pethick- Lawrence, My Part In A Changing World, London, Victor Gollancz, 1938, p. 235.
- (28) Marian Ramelson, Petticoat Rebellion, London, Lawrence and Wishart, (3rd Edn, 1976), p. 144.
- (29) Dame Christabel Pankhurst, Unshackled: The Story Of How We Won The Vote, London, Hutchinson, 1959, p. 202.
- (30) Votes For Women, 14 June 1912.
- (31) Votes For Women, 5 July 1912.
- (32) Daily Mail, July 1913.
- (33) Nottingham Guardian, 12 November 1912.
- (34) Nottingham Guardian, 27 January 1912.
- (35) Nottingham Daily Express, 11 March 1914.
- (36) Nottingham Daily Express, 23 November 1912.
- (37) Nottingham Daily Express, 12 March 1913.
- (38) Nottingham Daily Express, 12 March 1913.
- (39) Nottingham Watch Committee Reports, 18 March 1913.
- (40) Nottingham Watch Committee Reports, April 1913.
- (41) Nottingham Daily Express, 1 May 1913.
- (42) Nottingham Daily Express, 1 May 1913.
- (43) Letter to WSPU from Commissioner of Police In London, published in the Nottingham Guardian, 16 April 1913.

- (44) Les Garner, Stepping Stones To Women's Liberty: Feminist Ideas In The Women's Suffrage Movement. 1900 - 18, London, Heinemann, 1984.
- (45) Nottingham Guardian, 10 November 1913.
- (46) Dame Christabel Pankhurst, Unshackled: The Story Of How We Won The Vote, London, Hutchinson, 1958, p 241.
- (47) Andrew Rosen, Rise Up Women, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p. 230.
- (48) Lucy Bland, Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885-1914, London, Penguin, 1995, p.304.
- (49) Ibid, p.50.
- (50) David Mitchell, Queen Christabel, London, MacDonald, 1977, p. 230.
- (51) The Times, 9 August 1913.
- (52) There are many references to this man and his views in Leicester's local press.
- (53) Nottingham Guardian, 31 October 1913.
- (54) Nottingham Daily Express, 11 October 1911.
- (55) David Mitchell, Queen Christabel, London, MacDonald, 1977, p. 230.
- (56) Northampton Herald, 1 May 1914.
- (57) Nottingham Daily Express, 17 May 1913.
- (58) Northampton Herald, 15 May 1914.
- (59) Ibid.
- (60) Nottingham Guardian, 16 November 1913.
- (61) Nottingham Daily Express, 18 June 1914.
- (62) Nottingham Guardian, 15 June 1914.
- (63) The Suffragette, 9 May 1913.
- (64) E. Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffrage Movement, London, Virago Press, 1977, p. 460.
- (65) Ibid, p. 416.
- (66) Ibid, p. 244.
- (67) The Suffragette, 29 November 1912.
- (68) Quoted in David Mitchell, Queen Christabel, London, MacDonald, 1977, p. 213.

- (69) Northampton Mercury, 25 January 1913.
- (70) The Suffragette, 21 January 1913.
- (71) Andrew Rosen, Rise Up Women : The Militant Campaign Of The WSPU 1903 - 1914, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p. 189.
- (72) This column ran from 1902 until 1914.
- (73) Quoted in Eds, Glazer-Malbin and Waehrer, Women In a Man-Made World, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1972, p. 214.
- (74) Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, London, Equinox, (2nd Ed), 1970.
- (75) Northampton Mercury, 12 April 1912.
- (76) Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis And Feminism, Harmondsworth, Pelican, 1982.
- (77) Ibid, p. 101-102.
- (78) Quoted in Kate Millet, Sexual Politics, New York, Equinox, (2nd Edn,1970), p. 94.
- (79) Northampton Mercury, 25 January 1913.
- (80) The Pioneer, 13 September 1902.
- (81) Nottingham Records Office, DD893/4, Helen Watts, Speech at Eastwood's, Nottingham, 13 May 1909.
- (82) Margery Spring - Rice, Working-Class Wives, London, Penguin, 1939, p. 14.
- (83) Ibid, p. 14.
- (84) E. Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffrage Movement, London, Virago Press, 1977, p.605.
- (85) Marian Ramelson, Petticoat Rebellion, London, Lawrence and Wishart, (3rd Edn), 1976, p. 161.
- (86) Jill Liddington & Jill Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us, London, Virago Press, 1984, p. 250.
- (87) At no point were the Nottingham WSPU reported to have involved themselves in any of the issues at the time.
- (88) Nottingham Guardian, 1 March 1912.
- (89) Nottingham Guardian, 17 July 1913.

- (90) Nottingham Guardian, 1 July 1912.
- (91) Northampton Mercury, 22 August 1913.
- (92) Ibid.
- (93) Nottingham Guardian, July 1913.
- (94) Northampton Mercury, 14 March 1913.
- (95) Northampton Mercury, 22 August 1913.
- (96) Sheila Rowbotham, Hidden From History, London, Pluto Press, (3rd Edn, 1977), p. 87.
- (97) Leicester Chronicle, 16 November 1912.
- (98) Dail Chronicle, 12 June 1913.
- (99) Leicester Mercury, 16 November 1912.
David Mitchell, Queen Christabel, London, MacDonald, 1977, p. 192.
- (100) The Suffragette, 6 March 1914.
- (101) Leicester Mercury, 25 October 1912.
- (102) Quoted in Andrew Rosen, Rise Up Women, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p 220.
- (103) The Suffragette, 19 October 1913.
- (104) The Suffragette, May 1914.
- (105) Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement, London, Virago Press, 1977, p. 401.
- (106) Helen Sheriff related the events to her grandson-in-law, Mr Murby, Leicester.
- (107) ThePioneer, 17 July 1914.
- (108) Nottingham Guardian, 12 March 1913.
- (109) Nottingham Daily Express, 13 May 1913.
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- (111) Andrew Rosen, Rise Up Women, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p. 149.
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Chapter Seven

CONCLUSION: THEMES AND ISSUES WITHIN THE WSPU

Throughout the Edwardian period, one of the greatest achievements of the Women's Social and Political Union's leadership was their ability to set the political agenda at a time of much vicissitude in British politics. But more importantly, with their almost inspired publicity stunts and militant actions, they managed to implant, in the minds of the nation, an almost indelible image of radical feminism. But how does this relate to the rest of the country and to what extent were women in the provinces the same as those in London? In order to answer these questions a detailed study of three local branches was undertaken to find a picture of radical women outside their popular and traditional image. What was found in the East Midlands was a constituent mix of WSPU activists who were a curious assortment of political idealists and hardheaded trade unionists. In this final chapter we will draw together the various strands of the research and attempt to highlight key themes and issues of the WSPU within an East Midlands context and attempt a final overview. In contrast to the national movement, both the Leicester and Nottingham WSPU ostensibly ran from 1907 to 1914, while the Northampton branch was not started until much later, and, as a result, was not subject to the trials and tribulations of the other two.

However, during their time all three branches underwent considerable transformations and their story is one of change and development initiated through the policies of one woman, Christabel Pankhurst. In some respects, this is the key to unravelling the often confusing and contradictory chain of events that occurred during this period. Officious and omnipotent, she cast her long shadow over the movement with a power and personal influence that was to shape and mould the organisation in her own image. Consequently, no local study would have been possible without reference to the wider movement, with its contrived and centrally directed policies. This is an important point, for in any study of

the source and development of the WSPU outside the capital, the root of all ideoals is an important factor. Further, it is a salient point never to underestimate the significance of political and sociological influences in formulating a movement and its ideology.

Thus, when studying local branches of the WSPU, it was not always easy to understand the motivations and ambitions of the different women who would answer the call of the Pankhursts, for to each, the ideas and beliefs were as varied as they were many. Indeed, as with all struggles for equality and justice, the movement within the East Midlands touched and involved women from all classes within society. They were, by and large, an alliance of Liberals, Socialists, Nonconformists, Evangelicals and Primrose Leaguers, but for the duration and for the cause, they joined together under the feminist banner of militant suffragists to seek a conclusion to the reform that had begun in the 1860s. At first, the differences of opinion that existed between the members of the alliance seemed trivial, but in reality the calm co-existence hid a wealth of hostility, misunderstanding and concern and, despite the fact that it can be argued that their aims were much the same, their motives were not. Indeed, in some respects it is possible to argue that the form which the WSPU took after 1910 only satisfied the passions and ambitions of a younger, middle-class activist, and although they were finally to put the Leicester branch, at least, on a more professional footing, their efforts made them vulnerable to the charge that they had all but abandoned the working-class for a privileged vote. Even despite their later attempts to win working-class support by attacking the unequal power between men and women within the workplace, the WSPU became increasingly isolated, not only from the lively political debate that was taking place within the town halls and meeting halls in the boroughs the length and breadth of the country, but also from the Labour Left.

II

Nowhere was this political isolation more evident than in Leicester where the links between the Labour movement and the suffrage campaign were most prominent. For example, we can now say with certainty that in Leicester, as with Manchester, the formation of the WSPU was intrinsically bound up in Labour politics and the women's

trade union movement. These Leicester women had, to their credit, not only been deeply involved in the birth of the Leicester Labour Party, but also the Labour clubs attached to it, like the Clarion Cycle Club. This club, with its emphasis on the bicycle, was a potent force throughout the 1890s not only as an engine of liberation, but also as a vehicle for socialist ideals and a shaper of Labour opinion. It was unique in its day and although the Clarion vans carried their message far and wide, its socialism was something the average working man and woman could understand. Consequently, it was undoubtedly through the pages of its official organ, *The Clarion*, that many of the Leicester women were introduced to Christabel Pankhurst's views on women's suffrage in 1904 and 1905. In point of fact, Christabel Pankhurst had made much use of *The Clarion's* popular appeal to working women to publicise the infant WSPU's policies and views, and, unlike Nottingham and Northampton, when she approached Leicester's Trades' Council's executive committee to come and speak to its members, she was accepted without delay and arrived in Leicester on 18 July 1905. ⁽¹⁾

When looking back, it is easy to see that the links between the nascent WSPU in Manchester and the Labour movement were very much intertwined and the acceptance of WSPU speakers on Labour and socialist platforms was entirely in keeping with Labour thought and policy. Indeed, many leading members within the Labour movement, like Keir Hardie, saw the two groups as part of the same movement. As a result, it seemed to the women of Leicester only a natural extension of Labour policy to involve themselves in such matters, but as a consequence of Christabel's policies towards the ILP, the honeymoon was not to last and, before long, tensions between the women and the ILP destroyed all vestige of support and co-operation. Under the hegemony of the Pankhursts and mainly at the insistence of Christabel, constant attacks on ILP candidates at by-elections proved too much for many Labour members, like John Hodge, Secretary of the Steel Smelter's Union. Incensed with the WSPU's vitriolic attacks on the ILP, he wrote to the *Labour Leader* complaining of "the efforts of Miss Pankhurst and her friends to damage my candidature by the poster they issued." ⁽²⁾ As Liddington and Norris pointed out, Christabel was determined to work independently of other organisations and political parties, even if this meant not only jeopardising nearly ten years of patient trade union

effort, but also abandoning every political objective for the sake of just one issue. Indeed, as Walkowitz argued in her book, *Prostitution And Victorian Society*,⁽³⁾ it was the Contagious Diseases campaign, led by Josephine Butler, that provided the WSPU with an important lesson in the tactics of militancy. Not only did the Edwardian suffragists take note of the militant by-elections of the campaign, more importantly, they also focused upon the “need for feminists to operate outside of political parties.”⁽⁴⁾

Yet that did not mean to say that the WSPU in Leicester would immediately forsake issues of Labour; far from it. In the early years they contented themselves by fighting for women’s rights on their own. Indeed, they had consistently argued over the previous few years that the ILP and the trade unions had done little to promote their cause. Consequently, the new approach to militancy adopted by the Pankhursts suggested a more direct and positive way in which to push their evergrowing grievances within the workplace to the top of the political agenda. As a result, the road to the formation of the Leicester branch of the WSPU was built on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, as committed socialists and members of the ILP and the Women’s Co-op Guild, their loyalties naturally inclined towards the Labour Party. However, to Alice Hawkins and the other women, there appeared to be little choice and they quite happily ditched their male colleagues for the sake of just one issue, votes for women. As a result of this decision by working women in Leicester to form a branch of the WSPU, it can now be argued that the assumption by Liddington and Norris⁽⁵⁾ that the WSPU not only lacked a mass base outside London but also sustained little contact with working women is somewhat overturned. In some ways this is understandable. At no point in recent years has there been a major work in this area. All the research, with the exception of Liddington and Norris’ excellent study of the Manchester campaign and David Neville’s⁽⁶⁾ study into the women’s suffrage movement in the North East, has focused on events in and around London. But now, with the support of studies like David Neville’s *To Make Their Mark*, confirmation of working women’s involvement in the WSPU is now to be found in areas such as Jarrow, although he believes that the larger Newcastle branch’s class base was similar to that nationally.

Fortunately, the results of this study allow us to say with some certainty that in Leicester, in direct contrast to Nottingham and later Northampton, whose rank and file might have had a measure of working women, the leadership and motivation in forming a branch of the WSPU was entirely due to a group of working women from the boot and shoe industry. Yet although theirs was the driving force within the branch during its early years, in matters of policy, both at a local and national level, the evidence allows us some correlation with other research and it appears that in some respects Liddington and Norris' arguments do hold water. For despite close contact with the national leadership, it is now possible to say that the women who made up the sum of the branch were neither consulted nor expected to contribute to the overall strategy of the WSPU. The defection of Mrs Billington-Greig and others had made this perfectly clear. Without doubt, the position these women found themselves in was clearly credulous and the leadership in London neglected over a decade of political experience that might well have helped formulate useful policies. Yet, while they were excluded from the policy-making process at a national level, they were, to all intents and purposes, free to direct and instigate a local policy that would directly affect the native resident of Leicester.

The policies of Christabel Pankhurst were, however, to have a profound effect on a branch such as this. Of course she was also to exert great influence on the other branches as well, but in Leicester her policies actuated far-reaching changes in personnel. Indeed, for many critics of the WSPU, the political theory developed from the pen of Christabel Pankhurst appeared to have little in common with the average working woman within the East Midlands. This was because a contradiction appeared that was both confusing and counter-productive. While proclaiming that women who were already in the WSPU knew no barriers of class distinction, the reality at grass-roots level was very different. The elitism increasingly displayed by individual members had an off-putting effect on women who were still ideologically socialist. Not only were the tactics and policies of the WSPU alienating large sections of the working-class across the Midlands, on a national level the organisation itself was becoming detached from its labour origins.

Paradoxically, and despite Christabel's opinions on working women in the WSPU, there appeared to be a real concern within the London Headquarters at this steady desertion from the Leicester branch and by 1911, Sylvia Pankhurst, at the behest of Dorothy Pethick, appealed directly to working-class women through the pages of *The Pioneer* by writing a series of articles on the problems of working women and their grievances under the new Insurance Act.⁽⁷⁾ Further, the national leadership undertook a series of meetings around Leicester to promote the WSPU as a party that was concerned with working-class problems. For example, in April 1912, Mrs Flora Drummond and Georgina Brackenbury attended a meeting in the Corn Exchange where they addressed the concerns and worries of working women. Indeed, in an attempt at solidarity with many of the women sitting in the stalls, Mrs Drummond said that having joined the ILP over ten years before she was still "interested in the industrial question and inequality of women in the workplace."⁽⁸⁾ Unfortunately, it is hard to say exactly how successful these attempts were, but by August 1913 the Leicester Branch of the WSPU began a concerted effort to recruit women from both the trade union movement and the ILP by addressing them directly through their meetings as part of their autumn campaign. Nevertheless, although the number of women joining trade unions was rising in real terms,⁽⁹⁾ to all intents and purposes, they were fighting a losing battle for the hearts and minds of Leicester's working women. Not only were a majority of these women alienated by acts of militancy on private property, they also rejected as unworkable the WSPU's policy of a limited franchise. This loss of support was recognised by Mrs Billington - Greig in the *Militant Suffrage Movement*, when she argued that the WSPU in its earliest days could rely on working-class support, but in the pursuit of publicity through militancy these acts steadily weakened the suffrage movement's popular base.⁽¹⁰⁾

By 1912-13, the branch, with the exception of its small working-class core, had, in effect, moved too far to the right to have much in common with the realities of factory life. Still, that is not to say that all working-class women felt the same way and, although the numbers were relatively small, some new recruits filtered into the branch at various times between 1912 - 1914, notably Helen Sheriff, niece of the Labour radical Amos Sheriff and a Young Hot Blood from the boot and shoe trade, who arguably became the

branch's most successful arsonist under the supervision of Kitty Marion. Without doubt, this was primarily due to the input and influence of women like Alice Hawkins, Bertha Clark and Mrs Lowe. Although badly mauled in the process of embourgeoisment, the WSPU in Leicester could never completely ditch its working-class origins, nor indeed did it really want to. The problems encountered by working women at this time gave the WSPU a massive pool of potential recruits, and over the years, appeals often went out to these women to come and support them in their fight. Indeed, as Mrs Fagin confirmed in a Trades' Council debate on the Conciliation Bill in 1911, "there were a considerable number of working women in the WSPU" ⁽¹⁾ doing good work on behalf of working women. As such, throughout this later period, these women, with their good sense and hopes of social harmony, quietly inspired and led the younger and more impressionable Edwardian school teacher.

Of course, Alice Hawkins and Bertha Clark were of a different temperament from the Young Hot Bloods who were later to be found in both Nottingham and Leicester after 1910. They had been schooled in the politics of agitation at the cutting edge of industrial conflict, where open-air meetings were woven into the very fabric of working-class life. Consequently, the contrasting image of the working-class suffragette against the more popular London model was a familiar sight to the crowds gathered in the marketplace to hear the latest polemic between the Government and the WSPU. Their concerns and worries, therefore, were never completely marginalised and when national leaders attended meetings within the town they tempered their message to suit their audience and spoke in terms of women's low wages and poor working conditions. However, as it has been pointed out, this level of concern was certainly not translated into official national WSPU policy and, in reality, quite the opposite appears to be the case. This was because of internal pressure from middle-class women within the organisation who were intrinsically opposed to any connection with the Labour Party. The consequences of this pressure had two major, yet differing results. On the one hand, and leaving the Leicester women aside for a moment, this policy can be seen as something of a success, for not only did the split with the Labour Party allow the WSPU to grow, it also allowed the WSPU to increase its fighting fund with donations from wealthy women. As Andrew

Rosen points out in his rather dated, yet still useful study, "In 1910, the WSPU's income continued to grow rapidly, the total income being £33,027 compared with £21,214 the previous year." ⁽¹²⁾ On the other hand, this hostile approach to the working-class had a dramatic effect on provincial branches like Leicester, as they were forced into conforming to this narrow view. Nowhere was this transition more painful than in Leicester. Working women within the boot and shoe industry, who might have been tempted to join the group, felt alienated in a movement that had become blatantly middle-class under the direction of Dorothy Pethick. From 1911 onwards, the Leicester branch encountered little enthusiasm for their policies at factory gates amongst female shoe operatives within the town and often appealed to this group for more support. ⁽¹³⁾ Indeed, the older members who were already involved in the formation of the branch had, with the exception of a few hardcore supporters of the Pankhurst family, begun to feel marginalised within their own organisation by the influx of young middle-class women. ⁽¹⁴⁾

Yet, for her part, Alice Hawkins could distinguish between Labour politics and the work done by the WSPU. While championing the rights of working women within the trade union movement, she understood only too well that the Pankhursts' WSPU represented the best chance women had of achieving the vote, however limited. For her, what was more important was that a breach be made in male intransigence. Once this breakthrough had been made, history would be on their side and an enfranchisement of working women would be sure to follow. By 1912, there were many within the WSPU who believed that the country was suffering from two evils, the subjection of labour and the subjection of women. By eliminating the political subjection of women, other reforms were sure to follow. But as many women understood only too well, this type of approach to the problem was impractical and impossible and any attempt to canvass for full female suffrage would have to wait until men had universal suffrage. Therefore, because they were fighting for political, social and economic equality as it then stood, they argued that women should only have the vote on the same terms as men, which led them to be accused of only seeking votes for ladies. On this point, however, it is important to bear in mind that the policies introduced by the Pankhursts and the Pethick-Lawrences had a direct influence on the Leicester women. The WSPU was not, by any stretch of the

imagination, a democratic organisation, and when directives and policies were instigated by Clement's Inn, the branches were expected to follow them without question. Indeed to do otherwise, members ran the risk of expulsion. But, in a small number of cases, there is evidence to suggest that policies were often open to interpretation and Alice Hawkins and Bertha Clark focused on local concerns and issues that directly affected them. As Bill Lancaster has pointed out in *Radicalism, Cooperation And Socialism*, politics (in Leicester) were still perceived as being primarily about the world of work.⁽¹⁵⁾ Of course, under the leadership of such women it is hardly surprising that the local WSPU reflected the work they had begun in the Trades' Council and the trade union. However, in the early years they had not yet fully seen themselves as part of a wider organisation that would increasingly have little to do with working women.

As the Leicester branch progressed under the domination of Dorothy Pethick, and its working-class heritage was seen to fade in the face of a strong middle-class presence, the authority and prestige of Alice Hawkins remained an important ideological factor. Throughout the period she remained obligated and committed to the Pankhurst family and creed. Consequently, when the leadership of the WSPU all but abandoned its working-class origins, these strong local women refused to abandon their leaders. The reasons for this persistent loyalty are as yet unclear. But the admiration of some of these women bordered on the sycophantic. Indeed, Alice Hawkins often referred to Mrs Pankhurst as "our beloved leader."⁽¹⁶⁾ Nevertheless, at no time throughout this period did one charismatic leader arise from the ranks of either the trade union movement or the Labour Party in Leicester to take control and direct grass-roots radicalism on either feminist or socialist policies. Both Mr T Richardson, president of the local boot and shoe trade union and Ramsay MacDonald refused to give the lead these women needed. Indeed, not by any stretch of the imagination was MacDonald a radical in the vein of Tom Mann and consistently refused to stick his neck out on contentious policies. Conversely, Tom Mann made much headway with women like Alice Hawkins with his pamphlet, *Leisure For Working Wives*, published in June 1890. In this document Mann proposed that women, faced with the insalubrious rounds of washing, cooking and cleaning for husbands and children, should organise collective co-operative child care and domestic duties. This type

of thinking not only appealed to their socialist and co-operative backgrounds, but as Tom Mann shifted further to the left, some of the Leicester women went with him. ⁽¹⁷⁾

Given the reluctance of many of their male colleagues to support the WSPU, it is probable that Alice Hawkins and, to a lesser extent, Bertha Clark took a more pragmatic approach to the question of votes for women. While other working women appeared to feel compromised by Christabel's hostile policies towards the ILP, Alice Hawkins argued that to disassociate herself from the WSPU would mean rejecting the only realistic method of achieving the vote. It must be remembered that these women had been much affected by the Employer's Federation counter-attacks on trade unionism and the lowering of wages within the boot and shoe industry. Consequently, they had been attracted to an organisation that at first glance seemed to offer more than just hope at some later date. Indeed, up until 1906, the non-militant organisations within the town had consistently failed to attract these radical women. Thus, what the WSPU could offer, despite the increasing use of violence and arson in later years, was a realistic campaign that directly related to their independence and militant backgrounds. This was simply a local factor. Leicester always had a strong number of working women who were, to some extent, economically independent. This allegiance to the WSPU was certainly true in the case of Alice Hawkins and some of the other women working in the Equity. They only too readily abandoned the ILP in favour of a women's political party that would deal with industrial and economic issues as they saw them.

III

Thus, while working-class women in Leicester concerned themselves with achieving some kind of parity and equal status with men within the workplace for themselves, the middle-class women of Nottingham embraced the policies of Christabel Pankhurst with unqualified gusto and involved themselves with promoting a sex war against men in general. Indeed, so intense did this war become that, to all intents and purposes, it overshadowed the original aims and objectives of the WSPU, of which the creation of a women's organisation that included women from all social backgrounds was paramount.

In Nottingham, for example, the evidence of this was clear, when, under the leadership of Nellie Crocker, and later the dynamic leadership of Charlotte Marsh, working women consistently failed to promote their own interests and push themselves to the fore of the organisation. The branch, of course, attempted to promote working-class issues, but only in a limited way and the promoters were to be the middle-class women of the group. Therefore it must be concluded that despite a growing pool of dissatisfied working women around the town, and a suspicion that some working-class women were involved within the organisation, their concerns and problems were never really an issue to be tackled by the working women themselves, nor was their emancipation and education considered relevant by the local WSPU. As a result, the branch only really reflected the concerns and demands of women with money and influence and predictably sought to address the issues that confronted them in terms of Christabel's sex war. With this in mind, it is no wonder that the Nottingham branch embraced the escalation in militancy after 1912 and became one of the most prolific activists within the East Midlands.

The differences between the various branches demonstrate the need to understand the economic conditions within the towns, as well as between towns, to obtain a representative picture. For it would seem that economic prosperity had much to do with militant development. However, evidence other than the indicator of addresses within the town was extremely sparse and much reliance had to be made of the area in which a member lived to gauge wealth and influence. For example, women like Mrs Swain and her daughters who lived on Regents Road in Leicester were clearly not from the working class, nor judging by the size of the house, lower middle-class. But more importantly, we know who these women were, or at least the shakers and movers within the organisation. Unfortunately, the availability of good source material was limited and as a result it is possible that only a small section of the group emerged. Just because they could not be found in any real sense does not mean to say that many more were not involved, as many working women might have been supportive in other ways. However, what it does tell us is that their influence, had they been there, was clearly limited as at no point did their voice emerge. Instead, the evidence revealed not only the influence of the Pankhursts almost from an early stage, but the voice of the middle-class, mainly through the speeches

and writings of local women, like Helen Watts, Dr Fairfield and Lilian Hickling.

Nor was the WSPU an extension of other, older organisations that would have grounded them in any radical tradition, like the Women's Co-operative Guild. None of the existing records of the Guild mention in their roll-calls those who were to be found amongst the ranks of the WSPU. The two organisations appear to have been separate with little or no contact, with the result that there was no cross-pollination of ideas or, more importantly, ideals. None of the Guild's traditions, concerns or goals were allowed to infiltrate the Nottingham branch of the WSPU, either directly or indirectly. As a consequence, the branch, in its early phase, appeared to be less motivated and less focused than other branches with politically motivated women at the helm. However, it had what others lacked, and that was money, or at least access to money. As a result, a great deal of investment by the leadership went into cultivating the Nottingham branch, and although it is often very difficult to be precise about exact figures and commitments given by the Pankhursts, the fact that the group was able to maintain a professional leader indicates that the branch would not be allowed to drift. These leaders had to be appointed by Clement's Inn and it was never just a question of affordability, indeed, in the early years to 1912, the branch appeared to fluctuate in activity and a leader would clearly be needed to help maintain the branch's momentum.

In Northampton, on the other hand, a direct antithesis of the Nottingham branch was found and like the women of Leicester their roots can be traced to an older, local tradition. Whereas the Leicester branch was initially built upon the principles of socialism, in Northampton the branch was founded on a different type of radicalism that had developed from a wider Chartist-nonconformist freethinking Liberalism that had been active since the late 1840s. As Edward Royle has pointed out in *Charles Bradlaugh, Freethought and Northampton*,

Northampton was primarily independent because of its traditions based on the structures of small-scale workshop employment...(and) the political habits of shoemakers who had been voting Liberal since before

1832 and whose rural backgrounds were decidedly anti-aristocratic (which in Northamptonshire meant anti-Whig and anti-Church of England).⁽¹⁸⁾

As a result, the women within the Northampton WSPU were found to be entirely reflective of this traditional Liberal background and believed that it was within the individual to take responsibility for attaining self-improvement, but that also meant working within the confines of respectable politics and a moral goodness to establish a spirit of civic virtue. This rigid ideology was amply seen within the branch almost from its inception towards the end of 1912 to June 1914, when the local women pointedly refused and rejected the call to militancy with an unusual frankness.

For them, by 1911, Christabel Pankhurst had moved the WSPU beyond the concept of a common good and sought, through the use of extreme militancy and the destruction of private property, a limited franchise that would do little to promote a wider cause. Nor was the assault on private property a tactic that these women could in all conscience follow. Instead, they had come from a strong radical Liberal tradition synonymous with Bradlaugh that taught responsible, law-abiding principles and all notions of illegal activity were therefore immoral and hence, unjustifiable.

For these women, an obligation to obey the law was paramount and the Pankhursts' claims to a right to disobey the law was a claim to a right to thwart the principles of that law. As Nonconformist Liberals for the most part, they were free to disagree with the law, but not free to disobey it. They had, like their Leicester contemporaries, looked towards the inequality with men, but failed to see its implications within their own lives. They were far too provincial and, perhaps more significantly, middle-aged to have been influenced by the angry, radical and Bohemian ways of the London suffragettes who argued that the subordination of women more than warranted civil disobedience. Nor were they oppressed economically or socially and, for many, a comfortable lifestyle more than retarded any feelings of outrage at social injustice.

Instead, the group remained much as any other non-militant group might have done, and as a consequence did little in the way of militant acts. Indeed, the few sporadic outbursts amounted to little more than a poor pastiche of other groups. Nor did the local WSPU seek to identify itself with working women, let alone seek to address their grievances. Instead, they contented themselves with minor meetings that, upon reflection, did little more than mildly criticise the National Government. Whether this rather sedate attitude had an off-putting effect on other, more militantly-inclined women around the town is hard to say, but very few emerged to take the lead. Indeed, Alice Hawkins and later, Elsie Miller consistently failed to rouse a militant group in any of the boot and shoe areas like Thrapston and Kettering, let alone Northampton. Of course there were a few women, notably Agnes Croft and Mabel Crockett who both participated in large London demonstrations and committed militant acts, but they consistently lacked the fire and commitment of other suffragettes within the region.

Of course, another reason for this mild approach and their failure to recruit active Young Hot Bloods might be found in the lack of direct leadership from Clement's Inn. Indeed, Elsie Miller had only travelled down from Leicester, not London. The experience of both Leicester and Nottingham clearly demonstrated the importance of strong leadership, for in both towns their development shows just how important these professional organisers were. Not only did they dictate local policies by focusing the branch around a common cause, they also provided an important role model for the younger, potentially more radical women who were drawn to the branch with the prospects of danger and adventure. Further, in both towns the local organiser had the power to transform the branch in her own image, although in the case of Nottingham, Nellie Crocker, somewhat retarded the branch's evolution. But more importantly, the Northampton branch was to be denied the important influence of a professional London radical as local organiser. This was an important omission in their education and undoubtedly retarded any militant sympathisers that might have developed at a later date.

But more likely, the real reason why the national leadership appeared reluctant to actively invest a large amount of time and money in the branch was for the direct opposite reason

why they spent time and effort in Nottingham. They could see that it would never fulfil its real potential. Almost from the outset Christabel Pankhurst could see that the conditions that prevailed in Northampton would hinder the branch no matter what they did. As a London radical lamented in May 1914,

They used to look upon Northampton as a pretty progressive place, but now I am afraid it is now far behind the times. If Bradlaugh was still alive, I 'm sure he would say 'Northampton wake up!' ⁽¹⁹⁾

That said, in the latter years of the WSPU's short existence within the East Midlands, the focus for the vote was based around the injustice of male sexuality and, consequently, provides a valuable insight into the process of policy-making at Clement's Inn and the reasons why Christabel Pankhurst consistently refused to encourage the mobilisation of a large female workforce within the region. In some ways it might be argued that this was a serious error on Christabel's part, as many have since argued that the policy direction in London merely reflected Christabel's naive understanding of the English class system. At no point did she make it clear that she understood that the relationship between the classes was one of social inequality, economic exploitation and political domination of the workers by those in positions of power, the bourgeoisie. Indeed, she failed to appreciate the classic Marxist view which argued that inequality permeated all areas of social and economic life. Power, wealth, religious and social prestige, and a culturally distinctive way of life all necessitated against equality through the vote alone. Because of her intrinsic conservative leanings, she did not automatically associate women's inferior position in society with wider class and social inequalities that had little to do with voting rights. Instead, the leadership chose to fight the Government on a much narrower platform and attempted to challenge the existing idea that the exploitation of women was both natural and inevitable because of the result of men's natural sexual urges. As she wrote,

The relationship between men and women has centred in the physical and the relationship has become that of master and slave. ⁽²⁰⁾

Unfortunately these finer points were lost on many of the uneducated women within the region. Instead, they only saw a WSPU that was interested in achieving the vote for middle-class women. For them it was as if nothing had changed. The issues of privilege and wealth, so easily abandoned by middle-class women, were of major concern to working women, and as a result the gap could not be readily bridged. The WSPU had, in the words of Teresa Billington, reduced its demands for votes for women to a limited franchise. It had suppressed free speech on fundamental issues and squeezed the working-class from its ranks. Not only that, it had become exclusive, fashionable and narrowly religious.

Undoubtedly, this goes a long way towards explaining why the Pankhursts consistently failed to organise independent mass action by working women to win the vote, because mobilising the masses to take control of their own destiny is a class question rather than a sex issue. Whereas it was in a Marxist revolutionary spirit that Alice Hawkins fought unconditionally for the vote in Leicester, it was quite a different matter for middle-class women coming into the movement in Nottingham and Northampton. For them, it was in the spirit of reforming capitalism in order to improve an already "good system" that many middle-class women participated in the suffrage struggle. Ultimately, they took the position that entirely reflected their upper-class, anti-working-class bias. Like Helen Watts in Nottingham, many others honestly believed that once women had gained the vote they could rid the world of its wars, poverty and other social evils and, once middle-class women had the vote, they would have a duty to ensure legislation prevented the sexual and economic exploitation of working-class women. As Rosamund Billington ⁽²¹⁾ suggested, the concern of some middle-class women for the rights of lower-class women was indeed a genuine one, although perhaps not always an active one.

In Nottingham and, later, in Leicester this was certainly true. Indeed, both sides of the social strata believed they were laying the way for future generations and that the vote was an enabling issue, or a hub around which the spokes of many feminist issues could be attached. As Helen Watts said, the question of women's suffrage affected working

women in every part of their lives, even more than the educated and the well-to-do. As a result of this conviction, she constantly appealed to the working women of Nottingham not to dismiss the question with indifference. ⁽²²⁾ She believed that her and other middle-class suffragettes' good fortune and happy home-life simply threw into the blackest of contrast the awful misery and toil of thousands of working women's lives. For, unlike Alice Hawkins in Leicester, she believed that trade unionism was powerless and charity only accentuated the evil of sweated labour. ⁽²³⁾ Consequently, for Helen Watts and many other Nottingham suffragettes, the WSPU was a vehicle for social and political improvement that affected all social groups, and like the Pankhursts, she seemed to have regarded the relationship between the sexes and, indeed, the classes as one of a functional, complementary harmony that had fallen out of balance. It was not class, or economic power that mattered, but votes. As Helen Watts said in Nottingham,

The social and political conditions have been developing in such a way as to narrow... the women's sphere of duty....Her proper responsibilities have been more and more taken over by the state which has made no attempt to avail itself of her special knowledge and fitness and experience on this line. Women must demand free speech and... she (sic) must have a political voice if she is to fulfil her womanly place in the world. ⁽²⁴⁾

In some respects she was quite right in her political assessment of women's social and economic position, but the message fell short for the women most at risk of exploitation. At best Helen Watts was only seriously referring to what Ross Delmar alluded to in her paper, *Oppressed Politics*, ⁽²⁵⁾ as an articulated minority, who only wanted to gain entry into bourgeois politics. No real attempt was made to include working women in the WSPU in Nottingham and, unlike the women in Leicester, at no point in its brief history did the Nottingham WSPU involve itself with Labour politics, nor, indeed, the issues that were to concern working women the most, like the introduction of the Insurance Act and local victimisation within the workplace. Clearly these were missed opportunities for an organisation that professed to being interested in all aspects of women's lives.

Of course, working-class women could have joined, and no doubt some did, but their grievances were never fully addressed or understood nor were issues of class addressed in a positive way. For many working-class women, oppression not only existed in their lack of a political voice but also subjection within the workplace and even the home were far more important, for the simple fact that they had to deal with these issues on a daily basis. These issues were too immediate to be ignored for a metaphysical dream, laced around an ideology that would not pay the bills or meet the rent. What relevance did Helen Watt's words have in the back-to-back yards beneath the shadow of the tobacco and bicycle factory? For these women domestic labour was not only unpaid, but it was undervalued and a "real problem." Thus, while the vote appeared to be a lofty ideal, unrelated to everyday struggles of hunger and poverty, the decision to restrict the WSPU to just one issue isolated many women because it could not distinguish between the personal and the political, and between the family and the wider economy. As Margaret Benston has maintained, "The roots of the secondary status of women are in fact economic rather than biological or even ideological."⁽²⁶⁾ Indeed, one might even add political. Thus, for thousands of women, not only in Nottingham but elsewhere, the realities of the home, poverty and the endless routine of childcare were more important than campaigning, shoulder to shoulder, for the vote with women who had no perception of the realities of their lives. Indeed, on this point, Richard Hicking, the father of one of the Nottingham suffragettes * put his finger on the nub of the problem, and attempted to widen the political debate to encompass the current moral evil that was embodied within the white-slave trade, when he wrote in the *Nottingham Guardian*,

I am quite aware that many good men and women give their time and money to the work of rescuing fallen women, but they are not enough. If the prominent agitators for votes for women would put in half the energy into crying down the moral evils of the present day, as they do for shouting for the vote, they would, perhaps, do more good.⁽²⁷⁾

In the end, the WSPU within the East Midlands could not, or would not, provide the

* Lillian Hickling was arrested in 1911.

basis on which a strategy for a broader women's movement could be based. Instead, many women would remain invisible to the movement because, not only were they of little or no economic importance, they were also isolated within the home. Unlike many working-class women at work in the factories and shops, their isolation proved a greater barrier to organisation than oppression within the workplace. In other ways, too, the direction and motivation of the WSPU proved restricting for many women. The reluctance of Christabel Pankhurst officially to align or amalgamate the WSPU with the female trade union movement, debarred many working women from joining the organisation and restricted the movement to a small band of dedicated followers. As Martin Pugh wrote in *Women's Suffrage in Britain*,

Christabel had not only cut off the WSPU from a mass base in the working class; she had also, in her desire for unfettered command and loyalty, reduced the activists to a rump of family followers increasingly isolated from the real movement for women's suffrage.⁽²⁸⁾

Again, this refusal to get involved with women's issues denied many women the self-confidence to take control of their own lives. Instead, the low economic status of women's work all combined to make the female workforce highly vulnerable to what Peter Wyncoll referred to as "differential pressure."⁽²⁹⁾ Not surprisingly then, and despite the publicity-motivated attempts to recruit working women into the organisation, there is little evidence to suggest that the WSPU made any real impact on working-class women in either Nottingham or Northampton. Yet that is not to say that some working women were not attracted to the movement in Nottingham, as a few surviving letters confirm. But they stubbornly remained in the background, either unwilling or unable to undertake an active role in the formation of policies and the leadership of the branch. However, one such 'working woman' clearly felt compelled to have her say when she wrote, two days after Christabel's visit in December 1907,

Women can be trusted to do the most important work of the nation, as the mothers and trainers of children, future women, (and men). She can be

trusted to have a voice, not The Voice, in government. The sooner men realise that they are only a part, not the whole of the Nation, the better for them and for women too. ⁽³⁰⁾

In this sense, possibly due to their political heritage, many working women sought equality on men's terms, and most certainly did not set out to change society in any revolutionary way. In that sense, it is unlikely that a common goal was either perceived or desired. Of course, the vote was a common goal, but in reality different perceptions lay behind the campaign for the vote and what women could achieve with the vote. On this level, each woman believed her life was therefore a process of change and that their lives were in themselves a revolution. However bold and romantic this movement might now seem, in reality it evolved from a sequence of events that could well have led elsewhere. Even without the benefit of hindsight and an almost heavenly faith in their cause, women on both sides of the social divide had no real way of telling that their efforts would in fact lead to a critical process of change that would bring with it votes for women. Yet that is not to forget how radical the original dream of getting the vote was. Many women understood only too well that they were attempting to frame a world that challenged all the current perceptions of what women should be. Thus, like true revolutionaries, they explored every possible means of persuasion and debate, and when that failed resorted to arson, vandalism and acts of violence against members of the Government. As might be expected, the efforts of this transition were felt in different ways by different women, but in the main these extreme militant actions alarmed not only the Conservatives but also Socialists and Liberals alike and many, while not leaving the organisation altogether, called for a return to militancy within the accepted remit of public opinion. Of course, for some, the prospect of militant action was all-important and many answered the Pankhursts' call with delight and enthusiasm.

IV

Consequently, much of the evidence uncovered suggests that by the late summer of 1914 suffragettes within the East Midlands provided a role model that proved beyond doubt

women's capabilities in political affairs. In Leicester, this capacity was clearly demonstrated long before this in such organisations as the Women's Auxiliary Labour Party, but in Nottingham and Northampton women with little or no political experience, other than as token appendages of male parties, proved capable when channelled in the school of radical feminism. In some respects, this was the main saving grace of the organisation as a whole. For without the discipline and charismatic personality of the Pankhurst family at the head of the Union, it is doubtful if the WSPU would have become as successful as it did. Of course, there were many contemporary suffragists who argued, with some justification, that the Pankhurst leadership retarded the cause by insisting on total control over policy. Indeed, Annie Kenney, Christabel's faithful lieutenant later recalled the ruthless manner in which the Pethick-Lawrences were dismissed and exposed the paranoia of Christabel when she wrote,

Everything but the truth was told, which was that Christabel was afraid of, or rather suspected interference with policy. Christabel won, the fight continued, but the Movement as a Movement was lost. The two had gone who had been the creative geniuses. ⁽³¹⁾

But it is undeniable that they made the issue of votes for women stand out. Indeed, the evidence of the research completed since 1918 is a testament to an organisation that was unique and, if nothing else, put the suffrage question at the top of the political agenda.

In this respect, the WSPU has undergone something of a renaissance during the last few years, and now, some historians, like Diane Atkinson, in her book *Votes For Women*, ⁽³²⁾ have credited the WSPU with more recognition for their part in the struggle than previously thought. Now, as David Mitchell believed in *Queen Christabel*, the "legend of the WSPU is flourishing." ⁽³³⁾ But this legend would be incomplete without an investigation into the lives and motives of thousands of women up and down the country. For without local studies such as this, a large section of women's history would be unknown. It becomes important, therefore, to understand the level of commitment and involvement ordinary women played in the fight for the franchise. However, although

this might appear to be an obvious point, there has been, until now, little work done in the provincial branches. But through research such as this, we can expand our knowledge of the people who supported the Pankhursts and come to some conclusions as to the level of involvement these women had played in the movement. Indeed, with this information we can completely reassess the nature of the WSPU and view it from the ground up, and thereby get a completely different picture.

And a completely different picture is what we get. The overview is not distorted by the reminiscences of the privileged few. We see the leadership for what it really was, not what they wanted us to know. Of course, there is still some mystery that surrounds the WSPU, not least the undying loyalty local women gave to the Pankhursts. This dedication cannot be fully attributed to their celebrity status alone; other factors were clearly at work. But that in itself is revealing, for it allows us to see and assess the impact they had on the movement, and the influence they had on ordinary women. Indeed, when viewed in this way it becomes clear that these women could not have been assimilated into the militant organisation without the leadership and support of the Pankhursts. In many respects, they were the WSPU. They organised and directed the myriad of women who shadowed Government ministers across the land, making every political meeting subject to attack. By such actions, they won the admiration and respect of many people, and did much to lift the prestige of the suffragette movement. As a result, many men and women flocked to support the organisation like no other.

Of course, there was a down-side, and through this study we are able to note that many local WSPU members were physically attacked in the street and faced the wrath and ostracism from their own communities. As Brian Harrison has noted in *Separate Spheres*, street violence “was the occupational hazard of the reformer in Britain before 1914.”⁽³⁴⁾ However, the brutality meted out to suffragettes went much deeper than the rough-and-tumble nature of Edwardian politics. The savagery directed towards the WSPU and non-militant organisations before the Great War differed from the type of mass-violence which, according to Harrison, “greeted all unfamiliar movements in their early stages.”⁽³⁵⁾ Instead, violence against women suffragettes was not only prompted by

a deeper social concern regarding the role of women within the family, it also had a direct correlation with militant tactics after 1912. Indeed, this connection was all the more strengthened by the refusal of the Government to accept the legitimacy of the suffragettes' claim for votes for women. ⁽³⁶⁾

In many ways, this view is more than justified and many acts of aggression towards the women of the East Midlands can be directly traced to acts of militancy. For instance, the burning of the Nottingham boathouse in May 1913 was followed by a sustained attack on suffragette meetings within the town at which women were subjected to physical assaults at the hands of the crowd. As the *Nottingham Guardian* noted at the time,

With the recent burning of the boat club, members looked upon the demonstration as an excellent opportunity of extracting revenge. ⁽³⁷⁾

However, public onslaughts such as these had deeper roots than merely the need for revenge at the destruction of private property. Within these acts of violence lay a more profound and disquieting motive, and contrary to Charlotte Gilman's belief in *Women and Economics* that "industrial society had cured men of their aggression," ⁽³⁸⁾ many men were more than willing to show their objections towards votes for women for purely personal reasons other than those enshrined in politics. Instead, their anger was sharply focused on the changing role of women within the home. For many men there was an inherent risk that politically active women would endanger the future of the family itself. It was argued with some passion that if women were doing their duty within the household then they would have little time for politics. By definition, political activity could only mean that a woman was neglecting her family and household duties and this in turn would inevitably lead to the break up of the family.

Instead, they held to the traditional custom that, upon marriage, a woman takes on the politics of her husband and any attempts by individuals or organisations to challenge this view was perceived as a threat to their position within the family. ⁽³⁹⁾ While many men were imbued with Victorian aristocratic values of chivalry and sought to protect their

womenfolk from the hardships of political life , many working-class men unable to vocalise their feelings were more than willing to resort to violence to protect their social standing. Nor was this violence confined to the home; innocent women were sometimes attacked in the street if they were suspected of being a suffragette. In Nottingham, a young woman was pursued along Castle Boulevard by a number of men who believed she was a suffragette.⁽⁴⁰⁾ While in Leicester, young suffragettes were attacked outside the Old White Swan public house in the marketplace and their stall of sweets and cakes was burnt by disgruntled males.⁽⁴¹⁾

It is now possible, through research such as this, to argue that in some respects militancy within their own areas was a braver action than that committed by women within the capital. Up to a point, the London women were anonymous and could lose themselves in a sea of faces. But in Leicester, Nottingham and, to a greater extent, Northampton, we see the communities smaller and the infamy greater. These women could be, and indeed were, identified and offered up to public ridicule by their own neighbours. As Fromm has pointed out in his book, *Fear Of Freedom*,⁽⁴²⁾ fear of being seen as unusual and out of step with public opinion was a serious impediment to social and political action, especially to women. By transferring their allegiance and loyalty to a feminist group that had a measure and purpose about it, they were, like Alice Hawkins in Leicester, able to transcend this compelling need to avoid moral and social isolation.

But it was at a cost, for, like all movements that resort to militant action outside the constitutional framework, they were subjected to an exact and rigid discipline. Unfortunately, because of the revolutionary spirit of the women, this proved almost impossible without resorting to force and retribution within the organisation itself. But it resulted in local women acting in concert and in public for the first time. Consequently, through this research, we can observe for the first time that their loyalty to an abstract cause, instigated by the Pankhursts, bound them together as firmly as any other political organisation. Indeed, this readiness to overcome male inhibitions and habits was an extreme expression of the new mobility of women throughout the country rather than just those in London; and, perhaps more importantly, the thriving political arena within the

provinces proved an outlet for young middle-class energies that would have otherwise remained unoccupied.

On this point, it must be remembered that these women also took a very active part in the national campaign in London and many volunteers from the East Midlands went to prison and were force-fed in the name of votes for women. Although often over-shadowed by the more famous suffragettes, their contribution to the struggle was, nevertheless, immensely important. For without the support and participation of thousands of women from the shires, the London protests would have been little more than sporadic outbursts by a small clique of female activists. With the exception of Northampton, both the Leicester and Nottingham women frequently travelled to the capital to take their place alongside other women. By 1914, either through imprisonment or years of social work, most of these women within the local WSPU had gained first-hand experience of that world which made them more determined than ever to react to Christabel's rallying-call. Consequently, these young militants, in the name of their sex war, were more than willing to commit further acts of arson. Of course, it is now impossible to say, had the war not broke-out in August 1914, what other acts of fire-raising would have been carried out in the latter part of 1914. But it is fair to say that such acts would have undoubtedly continued under the guidance of those ardent arsonists, Kitty Marion and Alice Wheeldon.

Without doubt, a further research of the WSPU in other provincial towns is warranted in order to gauge the extent to which the East Midlands conformed with, or diverged from, a wider pattern, for only when all is known about the WSPU away from London can a reasonable assessment be made of the extent to which local women played a part in the development of the movement. This is an important point, for without it, no real history of these women can be considered complete, and, as a further study it is not without its own merit as the cause of the suffragette was a focal point of the formal politics of the first phase of the sexual revolution. Of course, around it were attached other issues, such as education, equality and equal pay, but because the forces of resistance were so strong and "opposition so monolithic and unrelenting,"⁽⁴³⁾ the struggle was long drawn out and

bitter and the winning of the vote took on a disproportionate importance. Thus, when historians look back on the struggle for votes for women, they often feel that our world is not the same one, and, with hindsight, highlight the horrors of those years. But what we see within the counties is a profile of a suffragette that was both good and bad. A woman who existed by virtue of imprisonment and the hunger-strike but embarked on a path that ultimately isolated wider support amongst women of all social classes. Consequently, not all women felt the need to enrol in what Helen Watts of Nottingham once termed the 'Shrieking Sisterhood.'

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion: Themes And Issues Within The WSPU

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Appendices.

Chronology Of Events Within The East Midlands 1907 1914.

1907

- 17 January. Leicester Trades' Council accepted WSPU speakers, Annie Kenney, Mrs Billington-Greig and Mrs Cobden-Saunders to talk at meeting.
- 11 February. Margaret MacDonald and other members of the Leicester NUWSS attended the "Mud March" in London.
- 13 February. Leicester women took part in the demonstrations at Westminster. Alice Hawkins was arrested and sent to prison for seven days.
- 19 March. Christabel Pankhurst, Mrs Rothwell and Alice Hawkins spoke at the Shoe Trade Hall in Leicester to talk about their prison experiences.
- 21 March. Alice Hawkins announced that the Leicester branch of the WSPU had been set up.
- 9 April. Inaugural meeting of the Leicester WSPU branch was held in the Welford Coffee House, Mrs Barnes presided.
- 10 April. Miss Edith Gittins of the Leicester NUWSS spoke at Women's Labour League meeting. She divorced herself from the tactics of Alice Hawkins in London.
- 15 April. First official meeting of the Leicester WSPU was held in the Welford Coffee House.
- 28 May. Emmeline Pankhurst, Sylvia Pankhurst and Mary Gawthorpe arrived in Oakham, Leicestershire to oppose the Liberal candidate.
- 31 May. After the Rutland by-election, both Sylvia Pankhurst and Mary Gawthorpe moved to Leicester to assist in the running of the branch.
- 6 June. First open air meeting held by the Leicester WSPU in the market-square. Mary Gawthorpe spoke.

14 July.	Sylvia Pankhurst and Alice Hawkins spoke in Leicester market-place.
16 July.	Sylvia Pankhurst and Alice Hawkins spoke in Northampton market-place.
27 July.	Sylvia Pankhurst spoke at a meeting in Harvey Lane Adult School, Leicester.
September.	Mrs Despard, Teresa Billington Greig and Edith How Martyn leave WSPU and form Women's Freedom League.
14 September.	The Leicester branch of the NUWSS took the right to vote to the Revisiting Barrister's Court. The court rejected their claim.
October.	<i>Votes For Women</i> first published.
16 October.	WSPU began a campaign in Nottingham. Both Christabel Pankhurst and Mrs Baldock held meetings around the town and county.
26 October.	Evelyn Carryer stood as an Independent, against Labour candidate in Leicester's Municipal Elections for the Wycliffe Ward. She lost.
27 November.	Mansfield NUWSS reject militant methods.
28 November.	Christabel Pankhurst barred from addressing students at Nottingham's University College.
28 November.	Nottingham's University College reverses its decision. Several Governors resigned.
28 November.	Nottingham University College students arrange for Christabel Pankhurst to speak in Woodborough Road Baptist Schoolrooms.
December.	Nellie Kenney appointed to run the Nottingham WSPU. It was a 12 month appointment.
2 December.	Christabel Pankhurst and Mrs Pethick-Lawrence attempted to hold meeting in Nottingham's Mechanics' Hall, but it was broken up by university students.
9 December.	WSPU held a second, women's only meeting in Nottingham's Circus Street Hall. Christabel Pankhurst and Miss Lamb spoke.
11 December.	WSPU attempted to disrupt Asquith's meeting in Nottingham's Mechanics' Hall. Four women were ejected from the meeting.
13 December.	WSPU attempted to disrupt Mr Harcourt's meeting at Radcliffe On Trent. The women were attacked and nearly thrown in the river.

1908

11 January.	Leicester WSPU held a meeting at the Welford Coffee House. Evelyn Carryer and Bertha Clark sent an official protest to the Town's Council for their refusal to appoint a female Probation Officer.
21 January.	Leicester WSPU held a meeting in the Welford Coffee House. Mrs Pethick-Lawrence spoke. She was invited by Evelyn Carryer and Alice Hawkins.
22 January.	Labour Party rejected WSPU claims and declined to support Votes For Women on their terms.

- 11 / 13 February. Both Leicester and Nottingham WSPU branches attended Women's Parliament in Caxton Hall in London.
- 8 March. The Leicester WSPU, Women's Liberal Association and the NUWSS organised a large "Suffrage Sunday" meeting in the Temperance Hall. Ramsay MacDonald, Mr Grayson and Mr Snowden attended.
- 18 March. Nottingham WSPU held their first public meeting in the Mechanics' Hall, Nottingham. Miss Barrett from London spoke.
- 21 March. 10,000 women, including delegations from Nottingham and Leicester attended Albert Hall meeting in London.
- 11 April. Nottingham WSPU held meeting in Victoria Station Hotel. Over 450 "ladies" attended to hear Christabel Pankhurst speak.
- 7 May. Emmeline Pankhurst and Miss Brackenbury paid a flying visit to Nottingham. They held a meeting in the Mechanics' Hall.
- 9 May. Isobel Logan, daughter of the Market Harborough MP, Paddy Logan, resigned from the Women's Liberal Association and joined the Leicester WSPU.
- 17 May. Alice Hawkins began a campaign to try and recruit working women into the WSPU from the Leicestershire village of Enderby.
- 30 May. Large demonstration in London. Although, largely a NUWSS march, many Leicester women attend, including Evelyn Carryer and Isobel Logan.
- 13 June. Alice Hawkins and Nellie Kenney conducted a week's campaign in Leicester and Loughborough. They attempted to raise funds to allow working women to attend the demonstration in London.
- 15 June. Lizzie Willson complained to a Boot and Shoe Union meeting in Higham Ferris that not enough was being done to help female workers.
- 21 June. Massive Hyde Park demonstration. Both Leicester and Nottingham sent members and Alice Hawkins spoke at one of the several meetings taking place. Purple, white and green were adopted as the official colours of the WSPU.
- 30 June. Large WSPU demonstration to Parliament. The police turned them back, and two women broke windows in 10 Downing Street as protest. Isobel Logan, from Leicester, was arrested and sent to prison.
- 1 July. Nottingham WSPU held meeting in Long Eaton market-place. Nellie Kenney spoke.
- Mid July. Miss Gladice Keevil appointed regional organiser for the East Midlands, with responsibility to both Leicester and the Nottingham branch.
- 18 July. Alice Hawkins and Nellie Kenney spoke in Nottingham market-place.
- 20 July. Large WSPU meeting in Nottingham, "On the Forest." 30,000 people attended and heard Mrs Pankhurst, Alice Hawkins, Nellie Kenney and others speak.
- 25 July. Alice Hawkins and Lizzie Willson held a meeting in Leicester's market-place to try and encourage more women to join the Union and the suffragettes.

- 27 July. Gladice Keevil and Alice Hawkins held a large meeting in Leicester's market-place.
- 1 August. Gladice Keevil, Nellie Kenney spent two weeks in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire speaking at open-air meetings, with some success.
- 8 August. Leicester WSPU member, Isobel Logan, invited Clarion Cycle Club to a Tea at her father's house in East Langton.
- 16 August. While on holiday in Tenby, Leicester WSPU member Isobel Logan held meetings around the town.
- 29 August. Both Lizzie Willson and Alice Hawkins held meetings around Leicester to try and recruit women into the trade union movement.
- 17 September. Alice Hawkins and Gladice Keevil held a meeting for working-women in the Lecture Hall, at the request of United Trades Club in Kettering.
- October. Start of an organised campaign of harassing Cabinet Ministers.
- 3 October. Leicester WSPU member, Isobel Logan attended a local NUWSS meeting. She championed the militant cause.
- 11 October. WSPU staged demonstration in Trafalgar Square. Several Leicester women, including Eva Lines attended.
- 12 November. Sylvia Pankhurst attended WSPU meeting in the Mechanics' Hall, Nottingham.
- 16 November. Christabel Pankhurst and Evelyn Carryer from Leicester held WSPU meeting in Boot and Shoe Trade Hall.
- 18 November. Leicester WSPU attempted to disrupt Asquith's meeting in Nuneaton.
- December. Nellie Kenney retired as organiser for the Nottingham WSPU.
- 12 December. Mr Birrell is accosted in Nottingham by the local WSPU. The branch organised a second meeting in Trinity Square Nottingham. Sylvia Pankhurst and Charlotte Marsh spoke.

1909

- 10 January. In Leicester, Edith New spoke in the market-place for two hours.
- 14 January. Anti's held meeting in Nottingham's Mechanics' Hall. Charles Dickens' granddaughter, Mary Anglea, told them that a woman's vote was "irresponsible."
- 15 January. Winston Churchill heckled by Leicester's WSPU members.
- 24 January. Leicester WSPU's meeting attacked in market-place.
- 25 January. Emmeline Pankhurst spoke at the Corn Exchange in Leicester. Earlier in the day, Mrs Bennett held an "At Home" in the Wyvan Hotel.
- 25 January. Gladice Keevil addressed a WSPU meeting at the Mechanic's Hall Nottingham.
- 30 January. Gladice Keevil and a selection of Nottingham WSPU members were arrested for obstruction outside of Winston Churchill's meeting at the Victoria Hall, Nottingham.
- 24 February. Women's deputation to Parliament. Helen Watts from Nottingham was arrested and jailed.

- 10 March. Nottingham WSPU member addressed a meeting of the Nottingham Scottish Association to plead the militant cause.
- 25 March. Helen Watts returned to Nottingham to receive a hero's welcome.
- 26 March. Emmeline Pankhurst attended a WSPU meeting in the Mechanics' Hall, Nottingham.
- 27 March. The WSPU announced that they now had eleven branches nationwide.
- 4 April. Woman was attacked in Nottingham. She was suspected of being a suffragette.
- 6 April. Nottingham Women's Liberal Association refused a request from the local WSPU to support women's suffrage.
- 10 April. Selina Cooper addressed a joint meeting of both the NUWSS and WSPU in St Marks schoolrooms in Leicester.
- 27 April. Helen Watts from Nottingham gave a lecture in a mock prison uniform to her local branch in the Clarendon Street School.
- 13 / 26 May. Women's Exhibition at the Prince's Skating Ring in Knightsbridge. Helen Watts, from Nottingham and Alice Hawkins from Leicester held a joint stall.
- 22 June. Miss Helen Ogston spoke at a WSPU meeting in Nottingham's market-place.
- 23 June. Nottingham WSPU held garden Party at 5 Mapperley Road, Nottingham. Miss Helen Ogston spoke.
- 29 June. Deputation to Parliament. Windows were broken in Whitehall, Downing Street and the Treasury offices. Dorothy Pethick, Dorothy Bowker and Isabel Logan, from Leicester, and Miss Rawson and Nellie Crocker from Nottingham, were arrested and sent to jail.
- 1 July. Miss Burgess resigned as Secretary to the Nottingham WSPU.
- 1 July. Gladice Keevil told the Nottingham branch that because they had a membership of 350, Nellie Crocker was to be soon appointed as paid organiser.
- 5 July. Marion Wallace Dunlop was the first to adopt the hunger-strike as a protest.
- 13 / 14 July. Stone-throwers in Holloway adopted the hunger-strike. They were released.
- Mid July. Nellie Crocker appointed to run the Nottingham WSPU. She was later joined by Gladys Roberts, to act as her assistant.
- 13 July. Nellie Crocker addressed a meeting in Nottingham's market-place.
- 25 July. Nottingham WSPU opened a shop and office at Carlton Street, Nottingham.
- 27 July. Nottingham WSPU attempted to disrupt Sir James Yoxall's meeting in the Albert Hall, Nottingham. Ejected from the meeting, they held a large meeting in the market-place. Helen Watts, Charlotte Marsh, Laura Ainsworth and Mrs Baines were arrested and released without charge.

4 September.	Both Alice Hawkins of Leicester and Helen Watts from Nottingham were jailed in Leicester for disrupting Winston Churchill's meeting in the Palace Theatre.
6 September.	Nottingham WSPU held protest meeting in the market-place to object to the arrests of WSPU members in Leicester.
8 September.	Alice Hawkins, Helen Watts and the other women were released from Leicester Prison.
13 September.	Helen Watts arrived back in Nottingham. She had been unfit to travel after her hunger-strike. Miss Rawson was expected to arrive some days later. She was still too ill.
24 September.	The start of force feeding on Laura Ainsworth in Birmingham caused a public outrage.
October.	Laura Ainsworth appointed to run the Leicester WSPU.
7 October.	Miss Helen Ogston spoke at a Social Reform League meeting at the Circus Street Hall, Nottingham.
8 October.	Miss Helen Ogston launched the Nottingham Autumn campaign with a "At Home," she announced that a number of national leaders would visit the town over the coming months.
9 October.	Nottingham WSPU held meeting at Mechanics' Hall. Dr Fairfield presided and Gladys Roberts and Nellie Crocker spoke.
12 October.	Miss Douglas-Smith and Miss Brackenbury addressed WSPU meeting in the Victoria Hall, Leicester.
28 October.	Nellie Crocker addressed Nottingham WSPU meeting in the Circus Street Hall.
12 November.	Lady Isabel Margerson addressed a WSPU meeting in Nottingham's Morley's Cafe.
18 November.	Nellie Crocker held a WSPU meeting at the Church School Rooms, Beeston. While Mrs Pethick-Lawrence spoke at a meeting in Ilkeston.
20 November.	Christabel Pankhurst and regional organiser, Gladice Keevil attempted to hold a meeting at the Derby Drill Hall. The meeting was disrupted.
22 November.	Lady Constance Lytton, and Miss Brackenbury addressed a WSPU meeting at the Temperance Hall in Leicester.
23 November.	The Hon Mrs Haverfield addressed a WSPU meeting at Nottingham's Morley's Cafe. The branch announced its coming campaign in the towns and villages of Nottinghamshire.
6 December.	Leicester Nurse, J Elsie Roe-Brown was arrested for breaking Post Office windows in Edinburgh. Sent to prison for 15 days.
11 December.	Nottingham WSPU held meeting in the Circus Street Hall. They announced their plans for the January General Election.
17 December.	Dorothy Pethick, on her way to Leicester from Newcastle, spoke. Dorothy Pethick and Dorothy Bowker arrived in Leicester to take over as organisers for the branch. They lived at 11 Severn Street.

1910

- 4 January. London WSPU held meeting in Northampton market-place. Police prevented the meeting from being broken up.
- 8 January. Elsa Gaye, from the Leicester WSPU helped the Loughborough branch in its General Election campaign.
- 8 January. Leicester WSPU attempted to hold meeting in Loughborough market-place, but it was broken up by local youths.
- 8 January. Christabel Pankhurst, on the death of her brother, failed to attend WSPU meeting in Northampton Town Hall. She was replaced by Mrs Pethick-Lawrence and others from Clement's Inn in London.
- 12 January. WSPU held several lunch-time meetings around Northampton and at factory gates
- 12 January. Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst Addressed WSPU General Election meeting in Albert Hall, Nottingham. "Keep the Liberal Out".
- 13 January. WSPU held a meeting at their temporary HQ in the Committee Rooms at 13 Bridge Street, Northampton.
- 15 January. Leicester WSPU attempted to hold meeting in Loughborough's cattle-market. Police protected the women.
- 24 January. Nottingham WSPU held meeting in Retford. Nellie Crocker & Mrs Douglas-Smith gave a talk on women workers.
- 26 January. Emmeline Pankhurst attended meeting in Loughborough. Bertha Clark attended meeting and helped with the opening of the shop in Baxter Gate, Loughborough.
- 28 January. Dorothy Pethick confirmed that she was to stay on as Leicester's organiser, and opened an office at 17 Highfields Street.
- January. General Election. The Liberals are returned.
- 1 February. Lady Lytton Addressed WSPU Meeting in Queen's Hall Nottingham. Outlined the policy of the hunger-strike.
- 2 February. Nottingham NUWSS collected 8,000 signatures in support of "Votes For Women."
- 2 February. Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst attended WSPU at Circus Hall, Nottingham. She is to oppose Colonel Seeby in the Ilkeston by-election. Dorothy Pethick organised the campaign.
- 14 February. WSPU declared truce to allow Conciliation Bill to be read.
- 25 February. Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst spoke at WSPU meeting at the Castle Gate Lecture Hall, Nottingham.
- 28 February. Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst and Charlotte Marsh held meeting in Ilkeston.
- 1 March. Nellie Crocker held meeting at Long Eaton, while Dorothy Pethick held meeting in Heanor market-place. Emmeline Pankhurst spoke at Town Hall.
- 2 March. Colonel Seeby won election for Liberals with a majority of 4,000.
- 5 March. Leicester WSPU held meeting in Kibworth village-hall. Both Mrs Pemberton-Peake and Dorothy Pethick spoke.
- 8 March. Leicester WSPU opened 'official' shop in Bowling Green Street.
- 12 March. Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst attended meeting in Leicester's Temperance Hall.

19 March.	Leicester WSPU held a second meeting at Kibworth village hall.
22 March.	WSPU held meeting in Circus Street Hall, Nottingham. Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst failed to attend. Isobel Seymour attended instead.
22 April.	Leicester WSPU began a campaign in Kibworth & Market Harborough. Then open-air meeting at Shepshed, Castle Donnington, Syston, Kegworth and Melton.
29 April.	Leicester WSPU held an 'At Home' in the Old Town Hall, Belgrave, Leicester.
4 June.	Mrs Brailsford, from London, held a meeting at Loughborough's Temperance hall.
14 June.	Conciliation Bill introduced into Parliament.
18 June.	Both Nottingham, Leicester & Loughborough WSPU took part in 10,000 women's procession from Black Friars Bridge to Albert Hall in London.
11 / 12 July.	No time is further allowed for Conciliation Bill.
14 July.	Joint procession is staged by both the Leicester WSPU & NUWSS.
18 July.	Huge WSPU meeting held in Nottingham market-place to demonstrate against the delay in the Franchise Bill.
23 July.	Second Large London demonstration. Both Leicester & Nottingham WSPU march to Hyde Park.
23 July.	Both Leicester WSPU & NUWSS staged protest in the Temperance Hall at the failing of the Conciliation Bill.
26 July.	Church League of Women's Suffrage attempted to bring all aspects of the suffrage movement to work together in Nottingham. Several WSPU members get involved.
12 August.	Leicester WSPU organised a campaign on Norfolk coast.
18 August.	WSPU sent letter to Nottingham Trades' Council. They ignored the letter. September. All Autumn 'At Homes' in Leicester were moved to Sunday School Memorial Hall, New Walk, Leicester.
20 September.	Charlotte Marsh and Dorothy Pethick spoke at the Town Hall in Nottingham.
29 September.	WSPU held meeting at Morley's Cafe, Nottingham. Mrs Brailsford expressed concern over Conciliation Bill.
14 November.	Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence attended an 'At Home' in Leicester.
17 November.	Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence stood in for Christabel Pankhurst at WSPU meeting in Albert Hall, Nottingham. She attacked Asquith's veto on the Conciliation Bill, and informed the meeting of the London demonstration for the following day.
18 November.	The Leicester WSPU produced a play, entitled, "How The Vote Was Won" and performed it at the Grand Hotel, Leicester.
18 November.	Albert Hall meeting in London. East Midland branches attended.

- 18 November. Several WSPU members from Nottingham and Leicester were arrested in London. Black Friday. They were Miss Lillian Hickling, Nellie Crocker, Miss Elsie Hall from Nottingham and Miss Katherine Corcoran from Loughborough, and Alice Hawkins, Miss Corrie Swain, Alice Ionides & Dorothy Bowker from Leicester. They were released without charge.
- 22 November. One-hundred & fifty-six people arrested in London, including Dorothy Pethick, Alice Hawkins, Miss Elizabeth Frisby & Elsa Oswald from Nottingham. All sent to prison
- 26 November. Mr Albert Hawkins ejected from Liberal meeting in Bradford. He sued the Liberal Party for £100.00 damages.
- 27 November. Loughborough WSPU held meeting in the Lecture Room in the Town Hall. Objected to force-feeding.
- 3 December. In Leicester, both Alice Pemberton-Peake and Jessie Bennett complained to the *Pioneer* at the treatment of the women in London on Black Friday.
- December. Leicester WSPU opened a special General Election shop at 275 Belgrave Gate during the second General Election.

1911

- January. WSPU resumed their truce.
- 6 January. Alfred Hawkins of Leicester, was honoured in Caxton Hall for his actions in supporting the WSPU.
- 7 January. In Leicester, both Alice Hawkins and Lizzie Willson elected to Leicester's Trades' Council.
- 24 January. Dorothy Pethick addressed meeting of Literary and Debating Society, at Mechanics' Hall in Nottingham. She explained militant tactics.
- 27 January. Leicester WSPU held a social in Belgrave's Old Town Hall to honour Alfred Hawkins.
- 4 February. Councillor R H Swain asked the Nottingham City Council to support the Conciliation Bill.
- 11 February. Alice Hawkins appealed to Leicester's Trades' Council to take more action on firms that "wage war on trade unionism" and anti women in industry.
- 17 February. Leicester WSPU began a campaign of handing out hand-bills at factory gates.
- 18 February. Leicester WSPU held meeting in the Temperance Hall. Christabel Pankhurst spoke.
- 24 February. Miss Miller began a campaign in Northamptonshire, but with little success.
- 3 March. Leicester WSPU held meeting in Town Hall, Loughborough. Mrs Kineaton Parks, of the Women's Tax Resistance spoke.
- 3 March. Leicester WSPU recruited volunteers for the next deputation.
- 18 March. Leicester WSPU held meeting at Temperance Hall. Mrs Eates advised them on Census resistance.
- 23 March. Leicester WSPU attended Albert Hall meeting in London.

2 April.	Census Night. The women in Leicester stayed in the shop in Bowling Green Street.
2 April.	The Nottingham WSPU spent the night in a private house in Nottingham.
28 April.	Miss J Jerwood, of Little Bowden Rectory, became Market Harborough's WSPU Organising Secretary.
April.	Leicester WSPU asked the local Trades' Council to support the Conciliation Bill.
5 May.	Conciliation Bill again debated.
22 May.	A poll held in Nottingham suggested that many Nottingham women did not want the vote.
6 June.	Leicester WSPU wrote letter to local Trades' Council asking for their support for the Conciliation Bill. They reject the offer by 5 votes.
17 June.	Leicester WSPU attended Albert Hall meeting and Coronation procession in London.
September.	Leicester WSPU began a second campaign in Kettering and Thrapston.
2 September.	Alice Hawkins & Lizzie Willson formed Women's Independent Boot & Shoe Union in Leicester.
October.	Miss Miller's Kettering WSPU branch began to falter. Moved to Northampton.
5 October.	Alice Hawkins attacked the attitude of Leicester's Boot and Shoe Union towards the WSPU.
11 October.	Christabel Pankhurst spoke at a meeting of The Free Church League for Women's Suffrage in the Victoria Hall, Nottingham.
16 October.	Leicester WSPU held meeting in Victoria Galleries, Leicester, to hear Miss Vida Goldstein, from Austria, and Lord Lytton speak.
7 November.	By announcing a Manhood Suffrage Bill, Asquith killed the Conciliation Bill.
16 November.	Leicester WSPU attended meeting in Albert Hall, London.
18 November.	Nottingham WSPU held meeting in Morely's Cafe, Nottingham. Mrs Brailsford brought them up to date on Conciliation Bill.
21 November.	Nottingham and Leicester women took part in window-smashing spree in the Strand, London.
28 November.	Nottingham and Leicester women attended Bow Street Court. Alice Hawkins, Elizabeth Frisby and Corrie Swain, Lillian Hickling sent to prison for 21 days.
29 November.	Nellie Crocker told the Nottingham WSPU, in Morley's Cafe, of the events surrounding the arrest of Lillian Hickling.
29 November.	100 MP's who once supported the WSPU signed a statement condemning their actions.
11 December.	Miss Miller organised a meeting for potential recruits in Northampton.
12 December.	Loughborough WSPU held meeting in Town Hall. Dorothy Pethick attempted to defend the WSPU's actions in London.

- 13 December. Leicester WSPU held meeting in Corn Exchange. They defend their action in London. They also call on Ramsay MacDonald and Labour Party to reject Manhood Bill.
- 5 December. First meeting of the Northampton WSPU branch held at the County Hall.

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- 1 January. John Burns MP harassed by WSPU in Leicester.
- 20 January. Nottingham WSPU failed to distract Lord Haldane in Nottingham's Albert Hall. Attempts were weak and sloppy.
- 27 January. Nottingham made to look fools when heckling Lincolnshire Farmers' Union
- 9 February. Lady Margesson arrived to talk to the new Northampton WSPU in Dr Bensley's house on Sheep Street regarding militancy. Her arguments were rejected by some.
- 10 February. Christabel Pankhurst arrived in Northampton and addressed WSPU meeting in Palace Theatre. She attempted to keep the husbands on board.
- 10 February. Nottingham WSPU member "Penelope", wrote a letter to *Nottingham Guardian*. Plea for women to come forward and join the movement.
- 10 February. Mrs Pankhurst attended WSPU meeting in Corn Exchange in Leicester to explain new policy on militancy. Rev Donaldson attended.
- 21 February. Annie Kenney, keeping up the pressure on the new Northampton branch, gave a talk at the Friendly Society's Hall, Northampton.
- 1 March. Nottingham Women's organisation formed as advisory board on Insurance Act. Nottingham WSPU refuse to get involved.
- 1 March. Mass window-smashing took place in London.
- 4 March. Further outbreak of window-smashing took place.
- 5 March. Two Northampton WSPU members, Mrs Croft and Mabel Crockett wrote a letter to the *Northampton Daily Chronicle*, defending militancy and outlining their part in the window smashing in London.
- 6 March. In London the WSPU HQ was raided and several women were arrested, including Nellie Crocker and Gladys Roberts from Nottingham and Nellie Smithies-Taylor, Dorothy Bowker and Gladys Hazel from Leicester. Christabel Pankhurst escaped to Paris.
- 6 March. Husband of Northampton WSPU member, Mr Thomas Collier, wrote to the *Northampton Daily Chronicle*, defending the actions of the organisation.
- 8 March. Mrs Bennett from Leicester was arrested in London for smashing windows.
- 16 April. Sylvia Pankhurst arrived in East Nottingham to direct by-election campaign. (Nellie Crocker and Gladys Roberts in prison) NUWSS declared support for Liberal, but WSPU declined to support either.

- 26 April. Miss Georgina Brackenbury and Mrs Flora Drummond addressed Leicester WSPU in the Corn Exchange on militancy and the need for Labour men to take up the fight.
- 1 May. Miss C Swain from Leicester was arrested in London for breaking windows in New Bond Street. While in prison given the Organiser's post in Leicester.
- 10 May. Miss Georgina Brackenbury again addressed the Leicester WSPU in the Corn Exchange. A social was planned to say goodbye to Dorothy Pethick and to welcome Mrs Smithies-Taylor from Holloway Prison where she had been on hunger strike.
- 8 June. Nellie Crocker and Gladys Roberts released from prison. Three days later they were treated to Welcome supper in Nottingham.
- 11 June. Mrs A Webbe, from London, gave a talk to the Northampton WSPU at the Whyte Melville Hall on the White-Slave Trade.
- 14 June. Dorothy Pethick left the Leicester branch. Miss Swain took temporary control.
- 18 June. Nottingham WSPU held a meeting in the market-place. Mrs Drummond, Laura Ainsworth spoke to denounce Colonel Seely.
- 18 June. Colonel Seely was adopted as Liberal candidate for Ilkeston.
- 24 June. Nottingham WSPU held a meeting in Ilkeston market-place.
- 27 June. Leicester, Market Harborough and Loughborough amalgamated into one Union.
- 29 June. Laura Ainsworth broke windows in Ilkeston Labour exchange. Mrs Flatman of Nottingham in charge of Ilkeston by-election.
- July. Leicester WSPU attended Hyde Park demonstration, in London
- 6 July. Violet Doudney from Leicester was arrested for breaking windows at the residence of the Home Secretary.
- 17 July. Miss Naylor gave a talk to the Northampton WSPU at the Whyte Melville Hall on the justification of window-smashing.
- 2 August. In line with their non-militant campaign, the Northampton WSPU protest at Colonel Seely's Liberal meeting in the Assembly Hall.
- September. WSPU moved their HQ from Clement's Inn to Lincoln's Inn House, Kingsway.
- 19 October. Lady Isabel Margesson spoke at the Temperance Hall Leicester. She attempted to justify further acts of militancy.
- 16 October. Nottingham WSPU held meeting in Beeston Church Street Schools. Miss Nellie Crocker spoke.
- 17 October. Mrs Pankhurst announced in the Albert Hall that the Pethick-Lawrences have left. Attended by Leicester and Nottingham branches.
- 30 October. WSPU reorganised in Leicester and Nottingham. Gladys Hazel, based in Birmingham took overall control, with Miss Cameron Swain as local organiser in Leicester and Miss Haley as temporary organiser in Nottingham.

- 9 November. Pillorbox-attacks begun in London.
 12 November. Mrs Sheppard announced that Nellie Crocker and Gladys Roberts have quit the Nottingham WSPU. Miss Haley temporary takes control under the guidance of Gladice Hazel in Birmingham.
- 16 November. Leicester WSPU interviewed both Liberal and Labour candidates for local newspaper, the *Pioneer*.
- 27 November. The Actress Franchise League put on two plays, "The Twelve Pound Lock" and "A Chat With Miss Chicker", for the benefit of the Northampton WSPU in the Town Hall.
- 20 November. Pillor-boxes attacked in Nottingham as a result of Landsbury's defeat in Bow. Flora Drummond announces working-class deputation.
- 23 November. WSPU cause uproar at Liberal Meeting in Nottingham's Albert Hall. Several women ejected.
- 4 December. Pillor-boxes attacked in Leicester for the first time.
 6 December. Leicester's oldest Suffragette, Miss Daring, died at the age of 95. She had been an active suffragist for 50 years.
- 7 December. Mr Smithies-Taylor from Leicester successfully sued the Liberal Party for assault.
- 10 December. Nottingham WSPU held meeting in Friends' School Rooms in Friar Lane. Miss Haley from Birmingham spoke.
- 11 December. Pillor-boxes attacked in Leicester.
 13 December. Alice Hawkins and Mrs Newcomer travelled to London to help with Christmas-fair.
- 16 December. Charlotte Marsh addressed the Northampton WSPU in the Town Hall on the merits on militancy.
- 30 December. Charlotte Marsh arrived in Nottingham to take control of branch.
- ### 1913
- 20 January. Mrs Mabel Crockett addressed Northampton WSPU meeting in the Town Hall.
- 23 January. Mrs Hawkins from Leicester attended a working-class deputation to Lloyd George with Mrs Drummond.
- 25 January. Northampton WSPU member, Mary Crockett, wrote letter to *Northampton Mercury* demanding votes for working women.
- 28 January. Militant demonstration at the House of Commons by the working-women's deputation.
- 22 January. Charles Hicking wrote letter to *Nottingham Daily Express* supporting militancy. Accuses Hobhouse of incitement.
- 28 January. Mrs Pankhurst declared a guerrilla war.
- 1 February. 15 pillor-boxes attacked in Nottingham.
 7 February. Pillor-boxes attacked in Nottingham.
 19 February. Police foil attack on links at Bulwell golf club.
 19 February. Annie Kenney addressed two WSPU meetings in Northampton.
 19 February. Attempted destruction of letters in Northampton pillor-box.
 20 February. Pillor-boxes attacked in Mansfield.
 21 February. Golf courses attacked across the country. Leicester Golf Club attacked.

24 February.	Pillor-boxes attacked with phosphorus in Beeston.
25 February.	Pillor-boxes attacked in Mansfield.
25 February.	WSPU interrupted Sir James Yoxall meeting in Stanley Street School. Nottingham. 6 or 7 women forcibly ejected.
27 February.	30 Pillor-boxes attacked in Nottingham.
28 February.	<i>Nottingham Daily Express</i> interviewed Charlotte Marsh regarding acts of militancy.
10 March.	Nottingham WSPU attacked stretch of railway "On The Forest".
11 March.	Annie Kenney's WSPU meeting in Circus Street Hall, Nottingham, attacked by men.
13 March.	Nottingham Watch Committee received claim for damages from Circus Street Hall. The claim was later (May 1913) rejected and the Chief Constable responded that all halls must take responsibility for all damages.
25 March.	Cat & Mouse Act passed.
3 April.	Mrs Pankhurst was sent to prison for 3 years.
9 April.	Mrs Suthern's Haystack on the Woolerton Road destroyed by fire. £100 damage.
12 April.	<i>Pioneer</i> interviewed Miss West in WSPU shop in Bowling Green Street, Leicester.
15 April.	Charles Rothera wrote letter in <i>Nottingham Daily Express</i> supporting militancy.
17 April.	Pillor-boxes attacked in Nottingham.
25 April.	In Northampton, Miss Elsie Miller resigned as organiser. Mrs Mabel Crockett takes over the position. Mrs Collier made Treasurer.
26 April.	WSPU attempted to disrupt Mr Acland MP's meeting in Nottingham's Albert Hall. He was Under Secretary of Foreign affairs.
28 April.	32 Telephone wires cut in Leicester.
2 May.	Nottingham WSPU gave lecture on social morality and women's franchise in a private house. No public hall available.
13 May.	Nottingham Boat Club destroyed by fire.
17 May.	Nottingham WSPU withdrew all financial support from church causes.
23 May.	Miss Tyson from London attempted to hold a meeting in Leicester's market-place. The meeting was broken up by an hostile crowd. Mrs Hawkins and her daughter were attacked.
25 May.	Pillor-boxes attacked in Leicester. Alice Hawkins arrested and imprisoned.
30 May.	WSPU meeting broken up in Leicester market-place.
30 May.	Leicester WSPU shop in Bowling Green Street had its windows smashed.
31 May.	Hoax suffragette bomb found in Nottingham.
3 June.	Leicester Watch Committee tried to ban WSPU meetings in public places.

- 6 June. 15,000 people assembled in Leicester market-place looking for WSPU. Many clash with police and innocent women were attacked.
- 9 June. Telephone wires cut in Nottingham. Response to Emily Wilde-Davison's death.
- 10 June. Despite recent troubles, Leicester WSPU continued to hold meetings in market-place.
- 15 June. Crawshay-Williams, Liberal MP for Leicester resigned creating a by-election. Concerted campaign was undertaken by the WSPU.
- 20 June. Leicester WSPU appealed to working-class not to vote Liberal.
- 23 June. Leicester WSPU organised a massive grand parade through the town.
- 23 June. Leicester WSPU continued meetings in market-place.
- 25 June. Miss Naylor addressed WSPU meeting in Temperance Hall, Leicester.
- 30 June. Charles Rothera wrote letter to *Nottingham Guardian* attacking Cat Mouse Act.
- 5 July. Charles Rothera wrote letter to *Nottingham Daily Express* attacking Cat & Mouse Act.
- 7 July. Nottingham WSPU held rowdy meeting in market-place. Charlotte Marsh spoke off the back of a dray.
- 17 July. Nottingham Trades' Council rejected WSPU's request to condemn the Cat & Mouse Act.
- 29 July. WSPU held meeting in Nottingham's market-place. They held the meeting from 4 wagonettes around the square. Four London speakers attended.
- 30 July. Northampton ILP held meeting in market-place to protest against Cat and Mouse Act. Local WSPU members attended, but did not speak.
- 3 August. Protest chanting interrupted the Litany in St Paul's. Protest chanting begins.
- 9 August. WSPU attempted to set fire to Central School in Forest Gate in Sutton in Ashfield.
- 9 August. Nottingham WSPU attempted to disrupt Lloyd George's meeting to the miners in Sutton in Ashfield on his Insurance Act.
- 15 August. Northampton WSPU's held meeting against the Cat and Mouse Act in market-place. The meeting was broken up by local youths.
- 20 August. Northampton Trades' Council censure local police for their inaction at WSPU meeting.
- 22 August. Northampton Trades' council held public meeting in the market-place to demonstrate public support for WSPU and to condemn Cat and Mouse Act.
- 1 October. WSPU attended Anti-suffrage meeting in Shaftsbury Hall.
- 10 October. Leicester WSPU heckled Ramsay MacDonald. Labour Party offered Miss Grew the chance to address the meeting at the end. She accepted.
- 13 October. Charlotte Marsh wrote a letter to *Nottingham Daily Express* condemning Cat & Mouse Act.

- 13 October. WSPU supporter, George Meadows wrote two letters to *Nottingham Guardian*. He suggested he is part of the movement.
- 19 October. Leicester WSPU attempted to set fire to Red House mansion, Loughborough.
- 21 October. WSPU held meeting in Nottingham market-place. Charlotte Marsh attempted to speak.
- 23 October. WSPU threaten to attack ballot papers in Nottingham's local election.
- 10 November. Nottingham member, Penelope, wrote a letter to *Nottingham Guardian* supporting militant actions.
- 10 November. Nottingham WSPU disrupted Richard Granger's Liberal meeting in the Castle Gate Lecture Hall. Several women were ejected.
- 12 November. WSPU organised a protest meeting in the Corn Exchange with eminent citizens of Nottingham to condemn Cat & Mouse Act.
- 16 November. WSPU interrupted service at St Mary's Church, Nottingham.
- 17 November. WSPU interrupted Sir Yoxall MP's meeting in Forest Road Council School Nottingham. Several women were ejected.
- 21 November. Pink liquid poured in Pillor-box in Ilkeston after Charlotte Marsh attended WSPU in the town.
- 23 November. Charlotte Marsh interrupted Dr John Massie's Liberal meeting in Nottingham. She was removed by force.
- 30 November. Charlotte Marsh wrote to Asquith to see if he would meet Nottingham WSPU when he comes to Nottingham. M. Bonar Carter wrote back declining the offer.
- 30 November. WSPU opened offices at 46 Bridlesmith Gate. This was Charles Rothera's Nottingham office.
- 30 November. Pillor-boxes attacked in ten different Nottingham districts.
- 1 December. WSPU disrupted service at St Andrew's Church Nottingham.
- 5 December. Gladys Hazel spoke at WSPU meeting in Temperance Hall, Leicester.
- 6 December. Nottingham WSPU threw leaflets from several local theatre balconys in a publicity stunt.
- 10 December. WSPU meeting in Friends' Schoolrooms, Friar Lane. Miss Haley spoke.
- 10 December. Charlotte Marsh announced campaign to recruit working-women.
- 15 December. Nottingham WSPU chant Litany at All Saints' Church Nottingham.
- 18 December. Flora Drummond stood in for Mrs Pankhurst at WSPU meeting in Nottingham Corn Exchange.
- 20 December. Telephone wires cut in Nottingham.
- 22 December. Nottingham WSPU again chant a Litany at All Saints' Church Nottingham.

1914

- 1 January. Miss Elizabeth Grew appointed as Organising Secretary to Leicester branch.

6 February.	Margaret West took over Leicester branch from Miss Grew.
19 February.	Haystack fire at Bullwell. £100 worth of damage.
28 February.	Mrs Sheppard addressed Conservative Club in Castle Ward, Nottingham.
25 February.	Ramsay MacDonald was heckled by the WSPU in the De Montfort Hall Leicester.
11 March.	Dutch Barn fire at Bulcote Nottingham. £2,000 damage.
20 March.	Ramsay MacDonald heckled by Leicester WSPU in De Montfort Hall
31 March.	Miss Naylor addressed WSPU meeting in Victoria Galleries, Leicester.
4 April.	Leicester branch attended rally in Hyde Park, London.
23 April.	Kitty Marion released from prison after being force fed over 232 times. She went to help Leicester branch organise its arson campaign.
30 April.	Dorothy Pethick left for America with Margaret Hodge.
1 May.	Northampton WSPU held meeting in Town Hall where Miss Naylor spoke.
15 May.	St Peter's Church attacked by Northampton WSPU. They only left WSPU leaflets.
22 May.	Northampton WSPU asked for, and received, the support of their local Trades' Council.
23 May.	Pillor-boxes in Leicester attacked with black fluid.
23 May.	Colwick Park racecourse. Horseboxes set ablaze.
25 May.	Shop windows attacked in Market Street, Leicester.
29 May.	Northampton member, Miss Margaret Capell, left the branch to get married and immigrate to Uganda.
22 May.	Leicester WSPU attempted to burn down Stoughton Hall.
1 June.	Leicester WSPU attempted to burn down Neville Holt mansion house near Market Harborough.
8 June.	All Saints' Church in Breadsall gutted by fire.
11 June.	Miss McCauley spoke at WSPU meeting in Friends' Schoolrooms, Friar Lane.
12 June.	94 branches of the Labour Party banned the WSPU from their platforms.
15 June.	WSPU interrupted service in St Andrew's Church Nottingham.
15 June.	Windows smashed for the second time in a week at the WSPU shop in Derby Road.
24 June.	Pillor-boxes attacked to mark Royal visit.
25 June.	Irene Casey arrested on King's Visit to Nottingham.
29 June.	WSPU interrupted service in St Mary's Church Nottingham.
3 July.	Irene Casey appeared in court.
17 July.	Helen Sheriff and Kitty Marion successfully burnt down Blaby Railway station in Leicester causing £500 worth of damage.
1 August.	Dr Helena Jones spoke at WSPU meeting in Friends Schoolrooms Friar Lane Nottingham.
4 August.	War declared with Germany.
10 August.	Mrs Pankhurst suspended militancy.

List Of WSPU Members In The East Midlands

WSPU MEMBERSHIP FOR LEICESTER 1907 - 1914.

This is, by no means, a definitive list of all member who participated in the WSPU in the East Midlands. However, it is a list of all the members who have come to light though the variety of sources consulted. Yet I am sure there were many who supported the movement and remained unknown.

List of Members.

Kitty Marion.	Actress came to Leicester from London.
Alice Hawkins.	18 Mantel Road, Leicester.
Miss Wells.	Travelled to London, February 1907.
Miss Knight.	Travelled to London, February 1907.
Mrs Catlin.	Wife of ILP Member. Travelled to London, February 1907.
Elizabeth Grew.	
Mrs Lowe.	Married to Local Counsellor, W. H. Lowe, 18 Harrow Road, Leicester.
Mrs Barnes.	46 Harrow Road, Leicester.
Mrs Wills.	House keeper, travelled to London in February 1907.
Miss Margaret West.	Organiser, July 1914.
Eva Lines.	
Jane Lavina Wyatt.	School Teacher, taught at Harrison Road School.
Ada Billington.	
Miss Gladys Hazel.	Organiser, November 1912.- (based in Birmingham)
Miss Evelyn Close.	
Miss A. S. (Bertha) Clark.	
Miss Evelyn Carryer.	Rough Close, St Johns ,Road, Poor Law Guardian.
Dorothy Pethick.	Came to Leicester in January 1910 as organiser, 11 Severn Street.
Isobel Logan.	The Grange East Langton, Mkt Harborough, daughter of Liberal MP.
Mrs Johnson.	Went London in February 1907.
Helen Sheriff.	One of three who attacked Blaby Railway Station.
Dorothy Bowker.	Companion to Dorothy Pethick.
Mrs F. W Bennett.	Known as Jesse Bennett, 104 Regents Road.
Alice Pemberton - Peake.	21 Oxford Street, wife of Dr Pemberton - Peake.
Laura Ainsworth.	Came to Leicester from hunger strike in Winston Green as organiser, October 1909.
Mr & Mrs Smithies-Taylor.	2 Newarke Street.

WSPU MEMBERSHIP FOR NOTTINGHAM 1907 - 1914.

List of Members

Helen Watts.	The Vicarage, Lenton, Nottingham.
Estella Ross.	28 Gloucester Crescent Nottingham West.
Nellie Kenney.	Annie Kenney's sister, first Nottingham organiser.
Miss Burgiss.	Head Mistress local school, organising secretary.
Mrs Webb.	Chaired several local WSPU meetings.
Mrs Elsa Oswald.	Member of Church League.
Miss Shaw.	44 Mansfield Road, Nottingham, Honorary Treasurer for Women's Liberal Association.
Mrs Woolett.	
Mrs Lloyd Thomas.	Wife of Reverend Lloyd Thomas.
Mrs Denman.	
Miss Mary Rawson.	5 Carlton Road Nottingham, arrested in Leicester in 1909.
Miss Nellie Crocker.	Arrested in Leicester in 1909, possibly a London Suffragette.
Rose Elsie Neville - Howey.	Born Finningley Rectory Nottingham, arrested many times, hid in organ at Colston Hall, Bristol.
Charlotte Marsh.	London Suffragette, organiser for Nottingham branch.
Florence Golding.	Kegworth Derby, complained of rough treatment by Liberals in Mechanics' Hall in Nottingham in 1907.
Alice Day.	Eastwoods, Nottingham.
Miss Jefferies.	
Miss J Anderson.	
Miss Wilcox.	
Miss Stephenson.	
Miss Walker.	
Miss Barrett. B.S.c.	Chaired local WSPU meeting and local organiser.
Mrs Sheppard.	
Dr Letita Fairfield.	Doctor at Nottingham General Hospital.
Miss Walker.	
Miss Wilford.	
Miss Wallis.	
Miss Rowena Goldberg.	48 Forest Road, Nottingham.
Miss Langford.	
Miss Cox.	
Mrs Ranger.	
Lilian Hickling.	Arrested several times.
Alice Wheeldon.	Set fire to All Saints Church in Breadsall.
Mrs Simon.	Married to Richard Simon, a supporter of the WSPU.

WSPU MEMBERSHIP FOR NORTHAMPTON 1912 -14

List Of Members

Mrs Bensley.	Sheep Street, Northampton, wife of Dr Bently.
Mrs Garrett.	Wife of one of the son of W. T Garrett and Sons, 32 Victoria Road.
Margaret Capell.	
Mrs Faulkner.	

Mrs Stewart.	
Mrs Shaw.	
Mrs Hillyer.	
Mrs Clarke.	Wife of Mr Clark, foreman in shoe factory.
Mrs Buswell.	Wife of Liberal candidate in 1909.
Miss Nicholson.	
Mrs Mardlin.	Wife of Chief Constable, 11 St Giles Street.
Mrs Baker.	
Mrs Gubbins.	Member of Women's Liberal Association, 20 St George's Place. Married to Walter Gubbins, son of Charles Edward Gubbins, small family boot and shoe Manufacturer.
Mrs Allen.	
Mrs Cockerill.	Wife of Mr A Cockerill, wealthy landowner, Thatched Farm Abington Park.
Miss Cockerill.	Daughter of above.
Mrs Mansell.	
Mrs Matthews.	
Miss Elsie Miller.	Leicester WSPU member who organised the branch.
Mrs E Branch.	Hill House, Kingsthorpe, wife of Herbert Branch, son of J Branch & Sons, small family boot and shoe Manufacturer.
Mrs Sabins Branch.	Abington Park Parade, married to Ernest Branch, son of J Branch and Sons, small family boot and shoe Manufacturer.
Mrs Mable Crockett.	East Park Parade, WSPU Organiser. Wife of Fred Crockett.
Mrs Mary Crockett.	11 Park Avenue.
Miss Agnus Carson.	Later Mrs Croft, wife of ILP organiser, Harold Croft.
Mrs Beattie.	"Sutton House" St George's Ave, former Women's Liberal Association and Lady Mayoress. Refused to become militant member. Married to George Wilson Beattie, Registrar of Births and Deaths.
Mrs Bernard Champion.	
Mrs FitzGerald.	91 Colwyn Road. Wife of William FitzGerald, Resident Inspector for <i>Commercial Union</i> .
Mrs Chamberlain.	Wife of Dr W. H. Chamberlain.
Mrs Ross.	87 St Giles Street. Wife of William Ross, Physician and Surgeon.
Mrs Foster.	
Mrs Church.	Member of the Church boot and shoe manufacturing Family.
Mrs Holland.	
Mrs Jellyman.	
Mrs Butterfield.	"Sunnyside" Cliftonville. Married to Alderman Henry Butterfield, proprietor of the <i>Northampton Daily Chronicle</i> and <i>Northampton Herald</i> .
Mrs Collier.	Pimrose Leaguer, became Honorary Treasurer OF WSPU April 1913. Wife of Thomas Collier, Conservative Councillor and partner in Collier and Clark, small family Boot and shoe manufacturer.
Mrs F Ellen.	"Rosecroft", Queen's Park Parade. Member of Primrose League. Wife of local Conservative Councillor, Fredrick Ellen, solicitor in Howes, Percival & Ellen.

Mrs Aston	11 East Park Parade. Wife of William Thomas Aston. Inspector with <i>Northampton Union Bank</i> and Churchwarden at St Michael's Church.
Mrs Brown.	Members of Women's Liberal Association. Wife of John Brown, Mayor of Northampton and proprietor of The <i>Garibaldi Hotel</i> , Bailiff Street.
Miss Brown.	Daughter of above.
Mrs Rose Tebbutt.	9 St Matthew's Parade, Phippsville. Wife of Albert Tebbutt, (Foreman) son of owner of G M Tebbutt & Son, Clare Street. Attacked militancy.
Mrs Gibbs.	
Mrs Webb.	Worked in rescue work for "outcast women."
Miss Oakley.	